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Justice Dinesh Kumar sworn in as K'taka HC CJ

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Justice Pratinidhi Srinivasavharaya Dinesh Kumar was sworn in as the new Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court at the Raj Bhavan on Saturday. Governor Thaavarchand Gehlot administered the oath of office to the new Chief Justice at a function held in the Glass House of Raj Bhavan. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was present at the ceremony. ***—Salar News***

5 killed after fire engulfs Himachal factory; 9 missing

SHIMLA, 3 FEB

The death toll in the fire at a perfume manufacturing unit in the Baddi industrial area of Himachal Pradesh's Solan increased to five as firefighters were working to bring the blaze under control nearly 24 hours after it started, officials said on Saturday. The massive fire broke out around 2.45pm on Friday. A search is also underway to trace nine people who are still missing, a senior officer said, adding that 31 people suffered injuries in the fire. A woman referred to the PGIMER Chandigarh was declared brought dead on Friday. ***—PTI***

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Modi to unveil projects worth Rs 11K cr in Assam

GUWAHATI, 3 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday reached Guwahati on a two-day trip, during which he will meet the BJP's state core committee and roll out development projects worth nearly Rs 11,600 crore. Modi was received by Governor Gulab Chand Kataria, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, some state ministers and senior civil and police officers. Welcoming him to Assam, Sarma called him as the most popular leader of the world, flag bearer of the country's development and Assam and Northeast's true well-wisher. ***—PTI***

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Maldives raps India over its troops boarding Male vessels

MALE, 3 FEB

The Maldives' government has formally requested the Indian government to provide "comprehensive details" of an incident in which its coast guard personnel allegedly boarded three Maldivian fishing vessels operating within its economic zone.

The development is the latest in the diplomatic row between the two nations that led to the strain in bilateral ties after President Mohamed Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, came to power in November last year in the Maldives.

There was no immediate response from the Indian government to the Maldivian allegations.

On 31 January, the Indian Army intercepted a Maldivian fishing boat engaged in fishing activities within the Maldives' Special Economic Zone (EEZ), located 72 nautical miles northeast of Dhidhdhoo, Haa Alifu Atoll, the Maldives' defence ministry claimed in a statement on Friday.

It said that the Indian troops boarded three fishing boats within the Maldives EEZ without prior consultation with relevant authorities, thereby breaching international maritime laws and regulations.

"Consequently, the Maldivian government has initiated an official request through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seeking comprehensive details of the incident from the Indian government," it said.

The statement said that boarding teams from Indian Coast Guard Ship 246 and Indian Coast Guard Ship 253 were responsible for interrogating the fishing boats.

Muizzu after becoming President formally requested India to withdraw 88 military personnel from his country by 15 March, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi.

His government was entangled in a diplomatic row with India after derogatory social media posts by three of his ministers against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

India on Friday said a "set of mutually workable solutions" was agreed upon with the Maldives for continuing the operations of Indian aviation platforms in the island nation.

At present, around 80 Indian military personnel are in the Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft that have carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions.

The Indian platforms have been providing humanitarian and medical evacuation services to the people of the Maldives for the last few years.

Following the high-level meeting in New Delhi, the Maldivian foreign ministry said India will replace its military personnel operating the three aviation platforms in the Maldives by 10 May and the first phase of the process would be completed by 10 March. *—PTI*

Indian Army intercepted a Maldivian fishing boat engaged in fishing activities within the EEZ ***PHOTO: X***

Advani to get Bharat Ratna days after Ram Mandir opening

Award was announced after row over 'side-lining' of Advani during opening

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Saturday that BJP stalwart and former deputy prime minister Lal Krishna Advani will be conferred the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award.

Narendra Modi's announcement has come in the year of the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The 'Pran Pratishtha' at the temple marks a triumphant closure for BJP of a deeply emotive issue which was thrust into popular consciousness by Advani through his 'Ram Rath Yatra' in 1990, opening the path for the Hindutva party's steady rise through the decade.

His Ram Rath Yatra in 1990 drew frenzied support and communal riots happened at different places but its popular appeal brought the BJP to power for the first time on its own in a big state like Uttar Pradesh and entrenched the party as a key force in a host of other states.

Modi himself was a key organiser of the yatra.

The demolition of Babri mosque at the site in Ayodhya by a mob in 1992 was described by Advani as the "saddest" day of his life, as the party feared political isolation and legal troubles with the Congress government at the Centre dismissing all its four state governments.

The award also comes after a controversy over Advani allegedly being side-lined during Ram temple's consecration.

Advani may or may not have coined phrases like "pseudo secularism" and "appeasement politics" but it is he who transformed them into popular idiom of Hindutva politics.

Modi was effusive in his praise of the contribution of the BJP's longest-serving president to public life. First in his posts on X and then at a public meeting in Odisha, Modi hailed Advani as one of the most respected statesmen who challenged dynasty politics and connected India's democracy to "all-inclusive and nationalist ideologies".

Advani, 96, greeted journalists at his home from a distance and later said in a statement that the award is not only an honour for him as a person but also for the ideals and principles that he strove to serve throughout life to the best of his ability. Last month, the government had named late Karpoori Thakur, a socialist stalwart and former Bihar chief minister, for the highest honour.

If the recognition for Thakur years after he passed away in 1988 was seen by many political experts as part of the BJP's push to deepen its roots among the economically backward classes (EBC), a category from which he came from, the honour for Advani is being seen as an ode to his instrumental role in shaping the party's core ideology which has come to dominate the country's polity under Modi.

Advani's contemporary and former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was bestowed the same honour in 2015. Advani is the 50th person to receive this. *—PTI*

Former deputy prime minister and veteran BJP leader LK Advani at his Delhi residence, in New Delhi on Saturday ***PHOTO: PTI***

'Shivakumara Swami deserves Bharat Ratna'

Vijayapura, 3 Feb

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday requested the Union government to confer Bharat Ratna posthumously on Siddaganga Mutt seer Shivakumara Swami. "I welcome Bharat Ratna for Advani, but I urge the Centre to announce the coveted award to Shivakumara Swami. The seer has made an immense contribution to humanity with initiatives like Anna Dasoha (free commensalities)." Shivakumar said the state government had written to the Centre over it. *—PTI*

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HIGH-LEVEL PROBE ON

Shinde's man shot by BJP MLA in Thane

THANE/MUMBAI, 3 FEB

A Shiv Sena leader suffered multiple gunshot wounds and is in critical condition after a BJP MLA fired upon him over a land dispute in Maharashtra's Thane district, prompting the Opposition to demand Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's resignation, citing deteriorating law and order in the state.

Deputy CM and state Home Minister Devendra Fadnavis said he has ordered a high-level probe to find out what made the MLA open fire and under what circumstances.

Kalyan MLA Ganpat Gaikwad of BJP opened fire on Mahesh Gaikwad, the Shinde-led Sena's Kalyan chief, inside the chamber of the senior inspector of Hill Line police station in Ulhasnagar area on Friday night, Additional Commissioner of Police Dattatrya Shinde said.

A court in Thane district remanded Gaikwad to police custody till 14 February. Gaikwad and two others were produced before a court of First Class Judicial Magistrate in Ulhasnagar in the evening.

Gaikwad said he used the firearm as his son was being beaten at the police station. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is trying to establish a "kingdom of criminals" in Maharashtra, he alleged.

Ulhasnagar falls in the Kalyan parliamentary constituency, represented by CM Shinde's son Shrikant Shinde. BJP and Shinde-led Sena belong to the ruling coalition in Maharashtra.

Mahesh Gaikwad was taken to a local hospital before being shifted to a private medical facility. *—PTI*

Shiv Sena leader Rahul Patil receives treatment after he was shot by BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

IN BIHAR CABINET

Nitish retains Home Ministry, BJP gets Finance, Health

PATNA, 3 FEB

Portfolios were on Saturday allocated in the new Bihar cabinet, with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar retaining the crucial home portfolio but giving away finance, which his JD(U) had held, to new ally BJP.

Besides home, which helps the CM maintain control over the state police, Kumar has also retained key departments such as Cabinet secretariat, election, vigilance, general administration and "all other portfolios not allocated to anyone else", according to an official notification.

State BJP Chief Samrat Choudhary, who has become a Deputy Chief Minister, has got finance, a portfolio that his party has always held whenever it has shared power with the JD(U) supremo. Earlier, when Kumar was running a government with the 'Mahagathbandhan', comprising Congress, RJD, the health, finance department was held by the JD(U).

Besides finance, Choudhary has been given health, another portfolio that BJP has held whenever it shares power in Bihar. Besides, he has been given commercial tax, urban development and housing, sports, panchayati raj, animal husbandry and fisheries and law.

Choudhary's party colleague Vijay Kumar Sinha, who is also a Deputy CM, has been given agriculture, road construction, revenue and land reforms, mining and geology, sugarcane, labour resources, art, culture and youth affairs, minor water resources and public health engineering department, the notification said.

JD(U) leader Vijay Kumar Chaudhary has retained parliamentary affairs, besides getting water resources, transport, building construction, education and information and public resources department. *—PTI*

Kejriwal had alleged that BJP offered Rs 25 crore each to seven AAP MLAs ***PHOTO: PTI***

Kejri in more soup as cops serve him 2nd notice, ED files plaint

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

After a five-hour drama, Crime Branch officials of the Delhi Police on Saturday served a notice on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, asking him to reply within three days in a probe into his claims that the BJP attempted to poach seven AAP MLAs.

Enforcement Directorate on Saturday filed a complaint against Kejriwal in a court here for not appearing before it in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam. The complaint was filed before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Divya Malhotra, who put up the matter for further hearing on 7 February. "

A Delhi Police officer said, "We have served the notice on him (Kejriwal). He can give the reply in three days in a written form."

The Crime Branch has asked Kejriwal to reveal the names of AAP MLAs who were claimed to have been approached by the BJP.

Earlier, a drama unfolded at Kejriwal's residence in Civil Lines as a Crime Branch team arrived again on Saturday to serve him a notice in connection with the probe.

Last week, Kejriwal, in a post on X, had alleged that the BJP offered Rs 25 crore each to seven AAP MLAs to quit the party in order to topple his government.

Shortly after Kejriwal, Delhi Minister Atishi held a press conference and alleged that the BJP had launched "Operation Lotus 2.0" in Delhi. *—PTI*

HC FUMES AFTER DOCTORS ABORT FOETUS OF RAPE VICTIM DESPITE STAY

KOLKATA, 3 FEB

Expressing displeasure at the medical termination of pregnancy of a rape victim by a team of doctors, Calcutta High Court sought an explanation from them as to why it was done despite an order to only form a medical board for ascertaining the pros and cons of doing so.

Observing that such action on the part of the concerned doctors was an over-action, Justice Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya said on Friday that the court had not permitted the medical termination of pregnancy.

Court directed that the report, to be filed before it on 9 February.The petitioner's lawyer had submitted before the court that she was suffering grave mental trauma and as such the court may permit the medical termination of the pregnancy which was stated to be between 20 to 24 weeks.

The counsel for the state, had submitted that as per the petition, the incident of rape took place on 28 July, 2023, and as such, the pregnancy may be more advanced than pleaded. *—PTI*

SHAH JAHAN'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Now, Taj is the new bone of contention

AGRA, 3 FEB

A Right-wing organisation has filed a petition in an Agra court seeking prohibitory injunction against the observation of the 'Urs' at Taj Mahal.

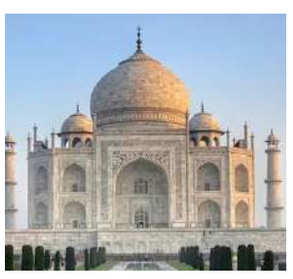
The petitioner, Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha (ABHM), has also challenged the free entry for 'Urs' inside the Taj Mahal. The court accepted the petition and fixed 4 March as the date of hearing.

The three-day 'Urs' event will take place this year from 6 to 8 February. The period is observed to mark the death of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, who got the Taj Mahal constructed in 1653 on the banks of the Yamuna river.

Petitioner's counsel Anil Kumar Tiwari said, "On Friday, the petitioner ABHM through its divisional head Meena Diwakar and district president Saurabh Sharma filed a petition in the Court of IV Additional Civil Judge (Junior Division) Room No 4 at Civil Court premises in Agra. They have sought for a permanent prohibitory injunction against the committee celebrating the 'Urs. The petitioner has also objected to having free entry for the Urs at the Taj Mahal."

ABHM spokesperson Sanjay Jat contended that the body had filed the petition on the basis of an RTI which revealed that neither the Mughals, nor the British allowed Urs to take place inside the Taj. "The petition has been filed on the basis of an RTI filed by a Raj Kishore Raje, an historian of Agra city. In the RTI, he asked ASI who permitted 'Urs' celebration and 'Namaz' on Taj Mahal premises. The ASI replied that neither Mughals, nor the British government or the Government of India have allowed 'Urs' celebration in the Taj Mahal," Jat said.

"So, on that basis we have filed a petition seeking the prohibitory injunction, stopping the organisers of Shahjahan 'Urs' Celebration Committee, headed by Saiyyad Ibrahim Zaidi, from celebrating the 'Urs' at the Taj Mahal." *—PTI*



Taj Mahal ***PHOTO: PTI***

PHOTO: X

BMTC launches new service to Vijayanagara

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

The Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) has introduced a new route in its non-AC services, effective from 5 February, 2024. BMTC continues to enhance its transport services, focusing on efficiency, reliability, and affordability. The new route, designated as NICE-4, operates between Vijayanagara TTMC with departure timings at 08.30am and Electronic City Wipro Gate with departure timings at 6.30pm, covering a 34km journey in one and a half hours by BMTC. The route passes through key areas including Chandra Layout and Nice Road, with a total of two trips scheduled per day.This initiative aims to provide commuters with more options for convenient and accessible transportation across the city.—*Salar News*

Dry Chilli Mela kicks off in Hubballi

HUBBALLI, 3 FEB

Farmers, consumers and stakeholders are thronging the 12th edition of Dry Chilli Mela which was inaugurated by Labour Minister Santosh Lad at Moorusavir Mutt playground in Hubballi on Friday. The three-day fair is aimed at promoting the diverse varieties of dry chillies produced in the region. Farmers from surrounding taluks, including in Dharwad, Haveri and Gadag, came down to attend the fair, which has more than a hundred stalls. The mela is organised by Karnataka State Spices Development Board, Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce & Industry, Horticulture Department, Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Hubballi, Amarashiva Farmers' Producers Association and Uluva Yogi Farmers Producers' Association of Amargola, The annual event has not only served as a lucrative platform for farmers to secure fair prices for their crops but has also provided consumers with access to high-quality dry chillies. After visiting the stalls along with Hubballi-Dharwad East MLA Abbayya Prasad, Labour Minister Lad said such events would help the farmers find a direct market for their yield and also sell their produce without the involvement of any middlemen.Kundagola in Dharwad district and Badagi in Belagavi are a hub of chilly cultivation. The chillies produced in Dharwad, Haveri and Gadag districts have high demand across the country.—*Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Cousins end life after families reject marriage proposal

KALABURAGI, 3 FEB

Two cousins have committed suicide after families rejected their wish to get married, at Magangera village of Yedrami taluk in Kalaburagi district. Sasikala, 20, and Gollalappa, 24, were in a relationship and wanted to get married. But their families refused to accept their union, citing their familial relationship. Sasikala's family fixed her engagement to another man from Sindagi village in Vijayapura district. On learning about this, Gollalappa took Sasikala to the village temple in Maganpur and they got married on Friday. They went to a plantation in the village and hanged themselves. The couple took a selfie of their marriage before committing suicide. Yadrami police station registered a case.
—*Salar News*

City beats traffic, drops to sixth most congested City globally

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Bengaluru commuters are currently relieved as City witnesses a slight improvement in traffic congestion, moving from the second most congested city in 2022 to the sixth in 2023, according to the TomTom Traffic Index. The average travel time for a 10km drive used to take 30 minutes in 2022 and this year, the travel time reduced to 28 minutes. This suggests that the average time it took to travel that distance has decreased by one minute, even though the congestion level remains at 63 per cent. The overall time spent in the year 2023 was one hour and 44 minutes, which is less than 2022.

The report highlights the impact of rush hour, with an additional 15 and 19 minutes spent in morning and evening commutes, respectively. Fridays between 6pm and 7pm emerged as the "worst rush hour," with an average travel time of 36 minutes for covering a distance of 10km.

Generally, peak congestion occurs between 6pm and 8pm on weekdays. While there is progress, the challenges still remain. According to the index data, the average Bengaluru driver spends almost 132 hours stuck in traffic annually, with an average speed of only 18 km/hr. The improvement in the traffic movability can be attributed to factors, including infrastructure development, increased use of public transport, and work-from-home policies. However, continued efforts are needed to further decongest the City and improve the lives of its commuters.

Extended weekend travel plans saw travel time spike to 33 minutes for a 10km stretch, particularly on the Outer Ring Road which is overwhelmed by tech park vehicles.

Bengaluru, Pune, New Delhi and Mumbai were the cities which had the most slow-moving traffic in 2023, according to the index reports. Bengaluru, which ranked second in the list, had improved itself by moving to the sixth rank, followed by Pune, which ranked seventh.

The top five most traffic-congested cities are London, Dublin, Toronto, Milan and Lima, respectively. This makes Bengaluru and Pune the only two Indian cities to make it to the top 10 in the list.

New Delhi had taken the 44th place and Mumbai had taken the 54th place.
—*Salar News*

City Traffic Police and volunteers took out a bike ride from Jayamahal Extension to create awareness on traffic rules as part of Road Safety Month, on Saturday. ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Cong demands Bharat Ratna for Shivakumara Swami

BJP, JD(S) leaders hail LK Advani for the highest civilian honour

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

BJP and JD(S) leaders of State on Saturday welcomed the Centre's decision to confer Bharat Ratna on veteran BJP leader LK Advani while Congress demanded to award the highest civilian honour posthumously on Siddaganga Mutt seer Shivakumara Swami.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said they do not oppose the Centre's decision of conferring Advani with Bharat Ratna. "But I had written a letter requesting to bestow Bharat Ratna award to Tumakuru Siddhaganga swamy," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "We welcome the government's decision to award senior leader Lal Krishna Advani but we wrote a letter requesting to bestow Bharat Ratna posthumously to Siddhagangaswamy. He was known for carrying out Annadasoha (serving food to the poor for free) throughout the State and he should be awarded."

Shivakumara Swami died at the age of 111 in January 2019 at his mutt in Tumakuru.

The Opposition in the State hailed the Centre's decision. Leader of Opposition R Ashoka recalled his memories with Advani during his

LK Advani ***PHOTO: PTI***

Shivakumara Swami ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ratha Yatra in the State. "I thank the Central government on behalf of all Kannadigas. Advani is the reason for the installation of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

He is an ideal personality and never compromised on principles and ideology," he said.

Senior BJP leader BS Yediyurappa said: "If there is a Ram temple today in Ayodhya, then it is because of Lal Krishna Advani. He was present when Babri Masjid was demolished."

Former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai congratulated Advani and called him the real son of the soil. "He united the people of the country through the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation. Thanks to his efforts, Ram Mandir, a dream of millions of people, has become a reality. He strengthened the internal security of the nation and made Bharat a strong nation," Bommai said.

JD(S) leader and former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy thanked the Central government for recognising a high-distinction person like Advani for the award. "Advani is an inspiration to all, embodying loyalty, commitment, friendliness and hard work in Indian politics. I extend my best wishes to him," he added.

Pejavar Math seer Vishwa Prasanna Teertha in Udupi lauded the government's move. He called Advani a representative of value-based politics who maintained the dignity of the offices he held.

Vishwa Prasanna Teertha said Advani had led the Ayodhya Ram temple movement in the early 1990s, which finally culminated in the temple coming up there, he added.
—*Salar News*

Nobody else as deserving as Shivakumara Swami: Surjewala

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Karnataka Congress incharge Randeep Surjewala has requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to award Bharat Ratna posthumously to Siddaganga Mutt seer Shivakumara Swami. "Siddaganga Mutt Seer Sri SriSriShivakumara Swamiji is truly deserving of the posthumous Bharat Ratna. Nobody else is as deserving as him for his service. He should have been awarded this earlier. He has fed, cared for and educated millions of children for free for decades. He is a role model to all Indians," Surjewala said in a statement. The seer has served millions of people and offered 'TrividhaDasoha' (three forms of charity) with no expectations. "The Sri treated all as one, educated millions and ensured that many who didn't have a chance before were given the chance to be upstanding citizens," he added. Calling the seer a walking god, Surjewala said: "The centurion seer was known as the god who walks among his devotees. His service is one that God has surely appreciated. When the mutt was low on funds, the Sri himself begged for alms so he could continue the education and serve food for all."Giving Bharat Ratna to the seer is a demand of 6.5 crore Indians. "This precious gift to humanity is once in a lifetime and I know all the 6.5 crore Kannadigas stand by me when I request this," Surjewala said.

—*Salar News*

CENTRE'S APPROACH

Fight against injustice: DKS to State BJP leaders

KALABURAGI, 3 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar urged the BJP leaders to fight against the injustice caused to the State by the Union BJP government on Saturday.

"The state BJP leaders must introspect their inability to get justice for the state from the centre. They have not made any attempts to meet the Prime Minister to discuss the state's interests and injustice caused by the disparity," said Shivakumar while addressing the press at Kalaburagi airport.

In regards to the protest held in Delhi on 7 February he added that the Centre has not released any drought relief and it is not devolving enough funds for the state. The funds earmarked for the state in the previous budgets are also not being released and hence the protest. All MLAs, MLCs, MPs, Ministers and the Chief Minister will take part in the protest.

Reacting to a question on the rejection of entry of a Swamiji into a temple, he said, it is natural for temples to be cleaned in the morning and evening. I will speak to the Muzrai officials and the district in charge minister to understand the exact situation. There is no place for untouchability, all of us are equal. All are allowed in our temples irrespective of caste or creed."
—*Salar News*

NAGAROTHANA PROJECT

CM: Will launch probe if there is delay in bills

DAVANGERE, 3 FEB

Siddaramaiah ***PHOTO: X***

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah assured that investigations will be conducted if there are any complaints about the officials delaying the bills of contracts under Nagarothana project in 10 districts on Saturday. This was after speaking to the media reporters in Davangere airport.

The Nagarothana scheme was launched at a cost of Rs 1,000 crore to upgrade infrastructure in 10 city corporations, with each corporation getting Rs 100 crore. "The list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections will be ready as soon as possible and the survey regarding the selection of the candidates is on," said CM on Congress Lok Sabha candidatures.

The number of ticket seekers is more in Congress, the list will be finalized after taking the opinion from local leaders, block committee presidents, MLAs and MPs, added CM in regards to Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar's son's desire in contesting the elections.

In regards to the announcement of BJP senior leader LK Advani being awarded with Bharat Ratna, Siddaramaiah said, "Let the award be given to Advani, we have not opposed it, but I had written a letter requesting to bestow Bharat Rathna award to Tumkur Siddaganga Swamy."

He said there is also a demand that the Bharat Ratna should be conferred posthumously on late chief minister D Devaraj Urs, who was instrumental in implementing the revolutionary Land Reforms Act and also for promoting downtrodden sections.
—*Salar News*

Meet decries NEP policies, decisions

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

The struggle against National Education Policy 2020 is not a fight for or against any party, but rather a struggle against the major problems in life, said Prof A Murigeppa, former vice-chancellor of Hampi University. He was speaking during the launch of a book that contains details of a survey on educational policies. The event, held at Gandhi Bhavan here on Saturday, was organised by All India Democratic Students' Organisation.

The three-year degree has been increased to four years in the NEP 2020, implemented by the BJP State government in haste without holding discussions.

Before implementing NEP, whom did the government consult? Did they conduct surveys among students? Are there sufficient class rooms and full-time teachers in schools and colleges? added Murigeppa.

AIDSO State Secretary Ajay Kamath said 21,000 students participated in a survey conducted among students, parents and teachers to oppose NEP-2020. They demanded a pro-people education policy in the State.
-*Salar News*

WITHDRAW PRE-BOARD EXAM CHARGES: HDK

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy on Saturday expressed his anger against the State government which issued an order that the money for SSLC pre-preparatory examination should be recovered from the students themselves.

Kumaraswamy on X criticized the government as a fast-paced. Kumaraswamy said, "Here is the evidence that the administration of the State Congress government, which is boasting that it has given five guarantees to the people, has gone to such a degenerate state."
-*Salar News*

Oppn challenges govt on grants by Centre

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Saturday challenged Karnataka government to compare the grants given to State during former prime minister Manmohan Singh's tenure and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's.

"We agree that we (Centre) are charging more taxes from Karnataka. Maharashtra is now paying the highest tax in the country," Ashoka said. Ashoka dismissed allegations of discrimination against the State. "The State gets 65 per cent of its tax share from Bengaluru. How much is given to Bengaluru and how much to the rest of the districts? Bengaluru hardly gets even 5 per cent of the grants allotted by the State. When the Kodagu people raised their voices against the discrimination, Siddaramaiah said it is not possible to divide the country based on tax and grants. Now his party wants to divide the country based on tax."

He said the Centre has no arrears due to the State. "If there are any confusions, Mallikarjun Kharge (Congress President) or DK Suresh (MP) could have raised the issue in Parliament during the last nine years. Now that the election is around the corner, Congress is creating an issue and staging drama," he said.
—*Salar News*

1-MONTH EXHIBITIOIN

Elephants come calling at Lalbagh

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

A one-month-long art exhibition showcasing 100 life-size elephant sculptures started in City on Saturday. These sculptures are made out of the stem of Lantana weed, an invasive species of plant.

Lantana Camara is an invasive weed that is native to South and Central America. The tribals of Tamil Nadu's Gudalur made these sculptures from the Lantana wood found in the Nilgiris. This project, called "Coexistence: The Great Elephant Migration", aims to spread awareness about human-wildlife harmony and conservation.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Subhash Malkade, IFS, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests; M Jagadish, Joint Director of Horticulture Department (Parks and Gardens); and environmentalist AN Yellappa Reddy.

Elephants made of Lantana weeds were installed at Lalbagh in Bengaluru. ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

As many as 60 elephants were unveiled at Lalbagh Botanical Garden, while smaller herds will be kept at parks, metro stations and tech campuses. Each elephant represents a real-life elephant that lives among humans in Karnataka.

Malkade said: "This exhibition is called coexistence because we wanted to educate the public on how to live peacefully among these gentle giants. Many of the elephants venture into cities because these are just landscapes for them. They do not know which is the city limit and which is not."

The exhibition is also a good method for clearing invasive species of plants like Lantana, said environmentalist Reddy. "These invasive species are the reason why biodiversity of the forest areas might get into trouble. This plant has already overrun 40 per cent of South India's protected areas," he said.

It is a time-consuming and tough process to make these elephants, Ketan, a member of the Betakuruba tribe of Gudalur told Salar News. "It takes two to three months to finish one sculpture, depending on the size of the elephant."

Besides the exhibition, the organisers will host a film festival, a photo exhibition, a photography contest, nature walks, street plays, role-play games and expert talks. —*Salar News*

Captured wild elephant dies in Bandipur

MYSURU, 3 FEB

A wild elephant that caused panic in Kerala's Wayanad died after being tranquilised and relocated to Rampura elephant camp in Bandipur forest on Saturday. The death of 'Thaneer Komban' elephant stirred concern and debates with Kerala Forest Minister AK Saseendran forming a committee to probe the death.
—Salar News

Journalists should reject superstitions: Siddaramaiah

DAVANGERE, 3 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has advised journalists to reject superstition and develop the courage to tell the truth to the people."Journalists do not need politics and they have to be objective," Siddaramaiah said while speaking at the inauguration of the 38th State Conference of Journalists at Davangere on Saturday. "Journalists should not call the guarantee schemes, which are aimed at increasing the economic power of the poor and the middle class, as free schemes. This non-partisan, secular and non-religious scheme should not be called a free guarantee; journalists should review it before writing about it," the Chief Minister said. The Congress leader said the media should identify the vested interests in the society instead of focusing on husband-wife fights all day long. "Media should focus on people hindering the development of the State and only then socially oriented journalism is possible," he said.Siddaramaiah said the media industry is dominated by the rich. "There is a need to protect the interests of the rich and a risk of writing against the interests of the poor. I am a supporter of freedom of expression," the Chief Minister said. In the post-independence era, the aspiration of protecting democracy is important. —*Salar News*

Lekhi flays people for not chanting 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'

KOZHIKODE, 3 FEB

Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi on Saturday lashed out at a section of the audience at a youth conclave here for not chanting the "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" slogan despite she repeatedly asked them to do so. A visibly irked Lekhi asked them whether Bharat was not their mother and even suggested a woman, who was reluctant to raise the slogan, to leave the venue. The conclave was organised by certain right-wing outfits. Concluding her speech, the senior BJP leader chanted "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" and asked the audience to repeat it. As the response from the audience was not as expected, she asked whether Bharat was not their home. "Is Bharat only my mother or your mother as well? Tell me...Tell me...Is there any doubt? No doubt?...Enthusiasm needs to be expressed," the Union Minister of State for External Affairs & Culture said. She said the response from the audience was poor. *—PTI*

ACB probe reveals 65K 'ghost' patients in Delhi's clinics

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) of the Delhi government has revealed that 65000 ghost patients underwent pathological tests at the Mohalla clinics through private labs last year, on Saturday. Two private labs conducted nearly 22 lakh tests during February-December, 2023, out of which 65000 were found to be fake. The labs were paid Rs 4.63 crore by the government for the tests conducted by them. Last month, Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena recommended a CBI probe into the reports of irregularities in lab tests conducted at the Mohalla clinics. The ministry of home affairs has directed the CBI to undertake investigation in the matter. "It also emerged that the Lab Management Information System (LIMS), containing the name and mobile number of the patients, was also developed, operated and conveniently manipulated by the two private labs," said ACB official. Analysis of one of the private laboratory's patient data showed listing of 12,457 tests with blank mobile numbers, 25,732 tests with 'zero' mobile numbers, 913 tests with fake mobile numbers like 1, 2, 3 etc; and 2467 tests with mobile numbers repeated more than 80 times for different patients, showed the report. *—PTI*

TMC MLA's bodyguard found dead

KOLKATA, 3 FEB

The body of a Trinamool Congress legislator's bodyguard was found in the premises of MLA hostel here on Saturday morning, police said. The deceased is Jaydeb Ghorai, who was the bodyguard of Trinamool Congress MLA Rajib Lochan from Bandwan in Purulia, they said. Police said the cause of the unnatural death was being ascertained and the body has been sent for post-mortem. West Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee visited the MLA hostel after hearing of the incident. *—PTI*

Rajasthan ex-CM Gehlot hospitalised for Covid, Swine flu

JAIPUR, 3 FEB

Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot was admitted to Sawai Man Singh (SMS) hospital with a fever and low oxygen saturation on Friday night. In a post on X, Gehlot said he had fever for the past few days and he has been tested positive for COVID-19 and swine flu. "Because of this, I will not be able to meet anyone for the next seven days. In this changing season, everyone should also take care of their health," Gehlot added. Dr Achal Sharma, Superintendent, SMS Hospital, said Gehlot was admitted to the government facility late last night with a fever and low oxygen saturation. "He is on oxygen -support and his condition is stable", Sharma added. *—PTI*

Court allows Soren to take part in trust vote

Champai's government to seek trust vote on Monday

RANCHI, 3 FEB

A special court in Ranchi on Saturday allowed former Jharkhand Hemant Soren to participate in the trust vote in the state assembly on 5 February.

Soren, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday in a money laundering case, filed a petition before the special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court, seeking permission to participate in the trust vote sought by the new government.

He was remanded to ED custody for five days by the court on Friday.

"Applicant (Soren) is, therefore, filing the present Application seeking an order from this Hon'ble Court to permit the Applicant to attend the Special Session of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly and participate in the proceedings of the Floor Test slated for 5 February at 11am," the petition said.

Congress leaves no stone unturned to 'guard' its MLAs at Hyderabad resort

Separate dining arrangement, police personnel to guard the rooms and several other arrangements are in place at a resort here to 'protect' Congress legislators of Jharkhand against 'poaching efforts,' sources in the grand old party said on Saturday.

Hemant Soren was arrested by ED on Wednesday in a money laundering case *PHOTO: PTI*

- Sources said 'phones are still with the MLAs' and the resort is teeming with police officers in plain clothes

The Jharkhand legislators, who arrived here on 2 February in chartered flights, were taken to the Leonia Holistic Destination at Shamirpet here and all the about 40 MLAs were housed in the 'Oh biz block,' under the watchful eyes of AICC Secretary and in charge of Telanagana Deepa Das Munshi.

Meticulous preparations of party managers to prevent unauthorised access was palpable.

Such preparations are to fend off the possible challenge of 'poaching' attempts by the BJP.

No one can reach the place where legislators stay by using other lifts or through other ways. Police officers are guarding the exit and entry points to the lifts 24 x 7.

The rooms where legislators stay is guarded by police personnel and 'unauthorised' exit or entry is barred.

Also, separate dining arrangements have been made for the MLAs on the first floor, which is out of bounds for other guests. The dining hall too has tight police security.

Sources said 'phones are still with the MLAs' and the resort is teeming with police officers in plain clothes. *—PTI*

BJP TRIED TO STEAL GOVT IN JHARKHAND: RAGA

GODDA/DEOGHAR, 3 FEB

Rahul Gandhi on Saturday accused the BJP of attempting to "steal" the government in Jharkhand and asserted that the Congress intervened to safeguard the people's mandate.

Addressing a gathering during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Godda district, Gandhi highlighted the role of the Congress in protecting the JMM-led coalition government, emphasising their commitment to opposing the BJP's ideology.

He reached Deoghar later in the day and took part in Rudrabhishek' at the famed Baba Baidyanath Dham besides addressing another rally at Kuwan Singh Chowk.

Speaking on the occasion, he said, "The country's youth want employment. BJP and Prime Minister Modi have spread the disease of unemployment in the country. This new disease has infected the Indian youth and has destroyed their future."

"Injustice against tribals, Dalits and backward class people are increasing in the country," he said *—PTI*

Modi unveils projects worth ₹68K cr in Odisha

SAMBALPUR, 3 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for projects worth over Rs 68,000 crore in Odisha.

Besides inaugurating the 400-crore permanent campus of IIM, Sambalpur, he unveiled several infrastructure projects in various sectors.

After unveiling 18 projects in the state, the Prime Minister said, "These projects will benefit the youth of Odisha and will create employment opportunities."

He said when an institution like this gets a modern campus, it leads to several benefits. "Students from all over India will come here to study," Modi said. He asserted that the goal of "a Viksit Bharat can only be achieved if all the states are developed".

Prime Minister flagged off the Puri-Sonepur-Puri weekly express, which will improve connectivity in the region, and dedicated the Jharsuguda Head Post Office Heritage Building to the nation. He also inaugurated the 412-km Dhamra

PM Modi inaugurates IIM Sambalpur campus in Odisha on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

- Three road projects, constructed by the National Highway Authority of India at the cost of Rs 2,110, were also inaugurated by the Prime Minister

Angul pipeline section of the Jagdishpur-Haldia and Bokaro-Dhamra pipeline project (JHBDPL).

Built at a cost of around Rs 2,450 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga', the project will connect Odisha with the national gas grid. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Governor Raghubar Das and Union ministers Dharmendra Pradhan, Bishweswar Tudu and Ashwini Vaishnaw were present at the function.

Modi also laid the foundation stone for the 692-km Nagpur Jharsuguda natural gas pipeline section of the Mumbai-Nagpur-Jharsuguda pipeline project. This project will be developed at a cost of more than Rs 2,660 crore. During the programme, Modi dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation stones for multiple power projects worth around Rs 28,980 crore.

Three road projects, constructed by the National Highway Authority of India at the cost of Rs 2,110, were also inaugurated by the prime minister. Modi dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation. *—PTI*

Amid MGNREGA tiff with Centre, WB to pay 21L workers

KOLKATA, 3 FEB

West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, on Saturday, announced that her government would transfer funds by 21 February to the bank accounts of 21 lakh MGNREGA workers in the state.Banerjee on Friday started a 48-hour-dharna in front of the BR Ambedkar statue in the city demanding release of 'unpaid dues' from the Centre for various social welfare schemesShe also said that she would soon come out with another announcement regarding the unreleased funds for the Awas Yojana.

"We do not want to beg from the BJP nor do we want their alms. By 21 February, we will transfer money to the bank accounts

Mamata Banerjee *PHOTO: PTI*

of 21 lakh workers who did not get the money from the central government even after working for the 100-day work scheme (MGNREGA) in the last three years. This is my first step", Banerjee announced at the dharna site.

"This fight is for the people who have been deprived. We will continue our fight and not let a single poor person be deprived in Bengal. Till I am alive I will fight for you people", the CM said.

"I will play all out and win all out. If all states, all frontal organisations and all regional parties and national parties come forward, then I think the fall of the BJP is inevitable. If BJP think that they are going to stay here long then it is wrong. They have tortured the people of the country for a long period," she said.She also reiterated that she would "never allow" the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state.

On Saturday former India cricketer and politician Kirti Azad along with social activist Yogendra Sharma visited Banerjee at the dharna manch. *—PTI*

Pb Guv resigns citing 'personal reasons'

HANDIGARH, 3 FEB

Punjab Governor and Chandigarh Administrator Banwarilal Purohit submitted his resignation to President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday, citing personal reasons.

Purohit's resignation came a day after he met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi. Their meeting came days after BJP swept the Chandigarh mayoral polls, retaining all three posts, a setback to the Congress-AAP alliance which alleged tampering with ballot papers by the presiding officer.

Before being appointed as the governor Punjab and administrator of Chandigarh, Purohit had also been the governor of Assam from 2016 to 2017 and the governor of Tamil Nadu from 2017 to 2021. Purohit had also been a three-time Lok Sabha member from Nagpur in 1984, 1989 and 1996. He had also won the Assembly elections from Nagpur East in 1978 and from Nagpur South in 1980.Purohit had been at loggerheads with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant

Banwarilal Purohit *PHOTO: PTI*

Mann over several issues, including holding the Assembly sessions and appointments of vice-chancellors. They had not been on the best of terms as squabble between the Raj Bhavan and the AAP government surfaced over many issues. Their relationship nose-dived when the Governor thwarted the Mann-led regime's plan to summon a special Assembly session in September 2022 to bring a confidence motion after he withdrew his order of summoning it.The row between the Raj Bhavan and AAP escalated when Purohit declined appointment of a cardiologist as vice chancellor of the Baba Farid University of Health Sciences and also sought removal of Punjab Agricultural University vice chancellor. *—PTI*

Nath junks rumours on joining BJP

Kamal Nath *PHOTO: PTI*

CHHINDWARA, 3 JAN

Senior Madhya Pradesh Congress leader Kamal Nath on Saturday brushed aside a query on his joining the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party but added that political leaders are free and not bound to be associated with any outfit.Nath was fielding questions from the media on the likelihood of his Congress colleagues like Acharya Pramod Krishnam joining BJP. "All are free, not bound to be associated with any party," Nath said.

On being asked about speculation of him switching sides, Nath said, "There are so many rumours going on, what can I say about them?"Queried on whether he would contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Nath said all decisions on candidates will be taken by the party. Candidates will be decided on the basis of winnability, the former MP chief minister added. Nath has represented Chhindwara in the Lok Sabha nine times.

On Thursday, Congress leader Krishnam met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and invited him to the foundation stone laying ceremony of Shri Kalki Dham in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal on 19 February. The meeting gave rise to speculation that he may join the Bharatiya Janata Party. *—PTI*

CBI NOT FULLY EXEMPT UNDER RTI, SAYS HC

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

CBI is not completely exempt from the purview of RTI Act. The transparency law permits it to provide information pertaining to corruption and human rights violation, said the Delhi court.

The proviso to Section 24 permits information pertaining to allegations of corruption and human rights violation to be made available to the applicant and the same cannot be included in the exception provided to organisations mentioned in the Second Schedule of the RTI Act," Justice Subramonium Prasad said in an order passed on 30 January and made available late Friday evening.

The high court passed the order on a plea by the CBI, challenging a November 2019 decision of the Central Information Commission (CIC) directing the probe agency to provide certain information to Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer Sanjeev Chaturvedi.

According to the officer, since CBI took no action on the information provided by him, he approached the Central Public Information Officer (CPIO) of the probe agency.

\- *—PTI*

'Centre set to take decisions on Manipur'

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh meets Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday in Manipur.

After the meeting with Shah, Biren said, "Today, I had the esteemed privilege of meeting with the Hon'ble Union Home Minister, Shri Amit Shah Ji in New Delhi. Engaging in a profound exchange, we discussed matters of paramount importance concerning our state.""Rest assured, the Government of India is set to take some important decisions in the interests of the people of Manipur," Singh wrote on X. The Chief Minister, however, did not indicate what the decisions could be.

Ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on 3 May,2023 after a tribal solidarity march was organised in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. Since then, over 200 people have been killed in the continuing violence.

Meitei's account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kuki's, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. A series of measures were

N Biren Singh *PHOTO: PTI*

- Shah had visited the state for four consecutive days in his efforts to calm down the warring communities

taken and that include constitution of a judicial inquiry committee, financial aids to the victims and sending additional troops.

Shah had visited the state for four consecutive days in his efforts to calm down the warring communities, however, intermittent violence continued.

On 29 November, 2023, a peace pact was signed by the government with Imphal valley-based oldest terror outfit United National Liberation Front (UNLF), a group dominated by the majority Meitei community, under which the insurgent faction has agreed to renounce violence. *—PTI*

Ban on polygamy, child marriage among recommendations of Uttarakhand UCC

DEHRADUN, 3 FEB

A complete ban on polygamy and child marriage, and a common marriageable age for girls across all faiths are among the major recommendations of a panel which drafted a Uniform Civil Code for Uttarakhand.

The panel has also recommended enforcing similar grounds and procedures for divorce.

The five-member government-appointed panel, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, submitted the four-volume report running into 749 pages to Uttarakhand Chief Minister, Pushkar Singh Dhami, who said the draft will be examined, studied and discussed before it is tabled in the assembly on 6 February. A special four-day session of the assembly has been convened from 5-8 February to pass a legislation on the UCC.

Couples whose marriages are not registered would not get any government facilities and arrangements will be made at the rural level to register marriages. UCC will provide a legal framework for a uniform marriage, divorce, land, property and inheritance laws for all citizens irrespective of their religion in the state.If implemented, Uttarakhand will become the first state in the country after Independence to adopt the UCC.The draft has not included population control in its ambit, and 3 per cent of the ST population have also been left out of its purview. *—PTI*

'Parties should come together to fight BJP'

GODDA, 3 FEB

Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Saturday said that the party assumes West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is still part of the Opposition bloc INDIA and all should come together to fight the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls.His statement came a day after Banerjee expressed doubt whether the Congress will secure even 40 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. Ramesh, on the sideline of Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Godda, said, "We are assuming that she is still part of the INDIA bloc, a group of 27 parties. Her priority, she claims, is to fight the BJP. Our priority is also to fight the BJP. I think it is better if we all come together".Banerjee said, "I proposed that Congress contest 300 seats, but they refused to heed. I doubt whether they will secure even 40 seats if they contested 300." *—PTI*

HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD

Leaders hail Bharat Ratna to BJP stalwart Advani

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Congratulatory messages poured in from various quarters as BJP stalwart and former deputy prime minister LK Advani's name was announced as a recipient of the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, on Saturday.After Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the announcement, Union ministers and top leaders of BJP and its allies said the award for Advani is "well deserved" and serves as a poignant acknowledgment of a "national hero's life" devoted to the service of the nation. Congratulating Advani, Modi said, "One of the most respected statesmen of our times, his contribution to the development of India is monumental." In a post on X, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said, "The decision to award Bharat Ratna to the revered Lal Krishna Advani ji, an

LK Advani *PHOTO: PTI*

inspiration. He is a symbol of purity, dedication and determination in politics."As a national leader, he has strengthened the country and democracy through his scholarship, parliamentary and administrative abilities, the defence he said.

Advani, 96, was the BJP's longest serving President. Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said it serves as a "poignant acknowledgment of a national hero's life" devoted to the service of the nation. Thakur described Advani as a "stalwart statesman" and said his "monumental contributions" have left an indelible mark on the trajectory of India's development, leaving an enduring legacy in the realms of politics and cultural unity.

"His unwavering dedication to public service in the Union Cabinet exemplifies his belief in the freedom of expression, role of media in nation building and lifelong commitment to welfare of the nation," the minister said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

4 killed as car crashes into house in Cuttack

BHUBANESHWAR, 3 FEB

Four people were killed as their car crashed into a roadside house in Odisha's Cuttack district on Friday. The incident took place near Gadadharpur village in the Tigiria police station area, while they were returning home after attending a wedding from a nearby village.The police said that the bodies were sent for postmortem, and initial report suggests that low visibility due to fog most likely caused the accident. In a similar incident from the same district, two people died as their motorcycle collided with a bus in Janhia Chhak area on Friday night.The victims were from the Jagatsinghpur district, and an investigation was underway to ascertain how the accident happened, said the police. *—PTI*

Woman, 2 kids found hanging in Ch'garh home

BALOD, 3 FEB

In Balod district, Chattisgarh, a 28-year-old woman along with her minor son and daughter were found hanging in their home on Friday. The deceased were identified as Hemlatha Sahu, her son Khomedra,4, and her daughter Trisha,2. Police suspect that the woman killed her two children first before dying by suicide. Preliminary information from the officials suggests that the incident took place while her husband and her in-laws were away from home. While the father-in-law returned back home, he found the trio hanging from the ceiling through the window. There are no suicide notes found and details will be revealed after the post-mortem report. *—PTI*

SC quashes FIR against Belgian man over forest fire

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Supreme Court has quashed the FIR and legal proceedings initiated against a Belgian national over the death of 13 people in a forest fire during a trekking expedition to Kurangani hills in Tamil Nadu in March 2018.The apex court noted that appellant Peter Van Geit, being the head of an NGO, was in-charge of facilitating those interested in trekking and had no role whatsoever in causing the deaths that occurred due to a forest fire.A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and AG Masih passed the order while hearing Geit's appeal against the 20 August, 2022 verdict of the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court which had refused to quash the FIR and proceedings against him.The bench, after perusing the FIR and the charge sheet, noted the charges against him were under sections of the (IPC). *—PTI*

Fake drugs racket busted In Nagpur, 21K tablets seized

NAGPUR, 3 FEB

The Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has seized 21,600 ciprofloxacin antibiotic tablets from a government hospital in Nagpur on Saturday. Three people have been charged, including a Thane resident who was previously taken into custody in a related crime. The fake tablets of ciprofloxacin, which is prescribed to treat a number of bacterial infections, worth crores of rupees were supplied to many government hospitals across Maharashtra. In March 2023, the FDA took samples at a state-run healthcare institution in Kalmeshwar, around 40kms from Nagpur. Following testing at a government lab in Mumbai, which yielded results in December 2023, it was discovered that the tablets lacked any therapeutic value. *—PTI*

PM pitches for flexible justice system for new challenges

Modi calls for cooperation among countries in justice delivery

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Noting that criminals have been using the latest technology for funding and operating across regions, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday pitched for expanding cooperation between countries for investigation and justice delivery.

He also said cooperation can happen even while respecting each other's jurisdiction and asserted that when nations work together, jurisdiction becomes a tool to deliver justice, not delay it.

The rise of cryptocurrency and cyber threats presents new challenges and there is a need for making the justice delivery system more flexible and adaptable, he said.

Speaking at the Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA) - Commonwealth Attorneys and Solicitors General Conference (CASGC) here, he said countries already work with each other in the domain of air traffic control and maritime traffic, and advocated extending this to investigation and justice delivery.

Narendra Modi with DY Chandrachud during Commonwealth Legal Education Association in conference in Delhi on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

"When we work together then jurisdiction becomes a tool to deliver justice and not to delay it," he said, adding that the nature and scope of crime have seen radical changes.

Sometime ensuring justice in one country requires working with other countries, he said.

He expressed hope that the conference works to ensure that everyone has access to timely justice and no one is left behind.

The 21st century challenges cannot be fought with a 20th century approach, Modi said.

Economic crimes in one region are being used to fund activities in other regions, the prime minister highlighted.

"The rise of cryptocurrency and cyber threats are posing new challenges.... There is a need to rethink, reimagine and reform," he told the gathering where Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud and other senior Supreme Court and high court judges and law officers were present.He said there was a need to modernise legal systems that deliver justice. *—PTI*

Ex-Aus PM hails Modi, says ties with India 10/10

JAIPUR, 3 FEB

Former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull has rated the Australia-India friendship 10 out of 10 and called Prime Minister Narendra Modi an inspiring leader who is "making a huge difference".The bonhomie between the two leaders was visible in the many photos from Turnbull's first visit to India in 2017. He has retired since and is currently touring India with his wife.Turnbull, who is one of the speakers at the ongoing 17th edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF), recalled his "lovely visit" to India in 2017 and the time spent with Prime Minister Modi.

According to Turnbull, who is also an established businessman, was part of the conversation between him and Modi too."When we first met, Modi said 'you have done a lot of international business in your life, you have done a lot of business with China, why have you done very little with India?'. I said, 'Truthfully, India is too hard to do business in as a foreign investor and he acknowledged that," Turnbull recalled.Though he did not criticise India's "strong protectionist tradition", He believes is something that every country manages in their own way. *—PTI*

AMID ARABIAN SEA ATTACKS

Min commissions INS Sandhayak, warns pirates

VISAKHAPATNAM, 3 FEB

INS Sandhayak, the first of four Survey Vessel Large (SVL) ships, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on Saturday at the Naval Dockyard in Visakhapatnam, in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Stating that the SVL ship will go a long way in obtaining information about the oceans and achieving the twin objectives of protecting the country as well as others, Singh warned that those involved in maritime piracy and smuggling will not be tolerated.

The primary role of INS Sandhayak is to carry out full scale hydrographic surveys of ports, harbours, navigational channels, routes, coastal areas and deep seas to enable safe marine navigation.

"Many choke points, like the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Guinea etc. are present in the Indian Ocean, through which a large amount of international trade takes place. Many threats remain at these choke points, the biggest being from pirates," Singh said, referring to the Indian Navy's prompt response to rescue ships from pirates.

The Minister warned that those involved in maritime piracy and smuggling would not be tolerated and lauded the Indian Navy for providing security not only to Indian ships but also those belonging to friendly countries.

INS Sandhayak was built at Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata. This project was steered by the Warship Design Bureau of the Indian Navy.It has a displacement of 3,400 tons and a length of 110 metres with a beam of 16 m, equipped with state-of-the-art hydrographic equipment, including deep sea and shallow water multibeam echo sounders, autonomous underwater vehicles and others.Side scan sonars, data acquisition and processing system, remotely operated vehicle, data acquisition and processing system and other advanced features are also a part of INS Sandhayak, which contains 80 per cent indigenous content. *—PTI*

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned INS Sandhayak in Naval Dockyard in Visakhapatnam **PHOTO: X**

5 killed, 9 missing in HP factory fire

SHIMLA, 3 FEB

The death toll in the fire at a perfume manufacturing unit in the Baddi industrial area of Himachal Pradesh's Solan increased to five as firefighters were working to bring the blaze under control nearly 24 hours after it started, officials said on Saturday. The massive fire broke out around 2.45pm on Friday. A search is also underway to trace nine people who are still missing, a senior officer said, adding that 31 people suffered injuries in the fire. A woman referred to the PGIMER Chandigarh was declared brought dead on Friday. Thereafter four more bodies were recovered from the site, Deputy Commissioner of Solan Manmohan Sharma said. The fire is yet to be brought under control as

Smoke billows after a fire broke out inside a cosmetic factory at the Baddi industrial area, in Solan district **PHOTO: PTI**

inflammable substances used for manufacturing perfumes and other cosmetics are catching fire, he said. After an FIR under sections 285 (negligence), 336 (endangering life), 337 (causing hurt and (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the IPC was registered, factory head of NR Aromas company, Chander Shekhar, has been arrested, the police said in a statement issued here. Director General of Police Sanjay Kundu, who reached the spot and took stock of the situation, constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Additional Superintendent of Police Ashok Verma to conduct a thorough investigation into the matter

"People jumped from the first and second floors of the building to save their lives and sustained multiple injuries on hands, legs and even spine," Sharma said and added that the reason behind the fire is yet to be ascertained. Thick smoke oozing from the cosmetic material hindered the fire-fighting operations, and workers climbed on top of the building for safety, eyewitnesses said.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is currently assessing the structural safety of the site and working to clear it of hazardous gases such as Carbon Monoxide, Hydrogen Sulphide and Sulphur Dioxide, police added. Following the clearance, a team of forensic experts will conduct spot inspection and collect necessary evidence. *—PTI*

JAMMU NH REOPENS AFTER 2-DAY CLOSURE

JAMMU, 3 FEB

Vehicular movement on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway resumed early Saturday after remaining suspended for two days following multiple landslides triggered by heavy rains and snowfall, officials said.

However, the traffic department advised commuters to follow lane discipline and drive cautiously as part of the arterial road near Sherbibi in Ramban district is single-lane and also slippery at a number of places.The traffic on the 270-km highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country, was suspended on Thursday morning after the road was damaged by a landslide at Kishtwar Patheri near Sherbibi, leaving hundreds of vehicles stranded on both sides.The snowfall also left the road slippery at various places between Ramban and Banihal, while several landslides triggered by rains blocked the road at Magerkote, Panthiyal, Mehar, Cafeteria Morh and Dalwas.After hectic efforts, the concerned road clearance agencies cleared the debris and allowed stranded vehicles to move towards their respective destinations late Friday afternoon, paving the resumption of normal traffic from both sides this morning, the officials said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

500 roads, 4 highways blocked after snowfall in HP

SHIMLA, 3 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

After consecutive days of moderate to heavy snow in several parts of the Himachal Pradesh, 504 roads, including four national highways, in the state were closed for vehicular traffic, officials said.

Shimla, the state's capital, saw a brief spell of snowfall on Saturday bringing cheer to residents and tourists. The weather office predicted heavy snow in isolated places of the state on Sunday.

The local MeT station has issued a 'yellow' alert for thunderstorm and lightning in isolated places on Saturday and for thunderstorm, lightning and hail storm with heavy snow at isolated places on Sunday.

The state saw moderate to heavy snow in several parts on 31 January and 1 February.

According to the state emergency operation centre, a maximum of 161 roads are blocked in Shimla, 153 in Lahaul and Spiti, 76 in Kullu and 62 in Chamba district and 674 transformers and 44 water supply schemes have been disrupted.

Road clearing operations are going on in full swing to clear snow from the roads at the earliest, PWD officials said.

Intense cold wave conditions persisted in most parts even as minimum temperatures rose by a few notches but stayed below normal.

Kukumseri with minus 8.1 degree Celsius was coldest at night while Narkanda, Kalpa, Dalhousie and Manali shivered at minus 5.6 degrees Celsius, minus 3.7 degrees Celsius, minus 3.1 degrees Celsius and minus 1.8 degrees Celsius respectively. Shimla recorded a minimum night temperature of 1.8 degrees Celsius.

Authorities have issued avalanche warnings in hilly and mountainous areas of Kashmir while motorists have been advised to drive carefully in view of slippery roads, the officials said. *—PTI*

PRIDE PARADE

Members and supporters of the LGBTQI+ community take part in the Mumbai's Queer Pride Parade, in Mumbai, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

PROF, 5 STUDENTS ARRESTED OVER PLAY BASED ON 'RAMLEELA' AT PUNE VARSITY

PUNE, 3 FEB

A professor and five students of the Pune University have been arrested for allegedly hurting religious sentiments by staging a play based on 'Ramleela' on Saturday.

The play had objectionable dialogues and scenes and the FIR suggests in the play, a male artiste portraying Sita was shown smoking a cigarette and using abusive language.

In this regard, the police have arrested Pravin Bhole, Head of the Department of the Lalit Kala Kendra, and students Bhavesh Patil, Jay Pednekar, Prathamesh Sawant, Rishikesh Dalvi and Yash Chikhle.

The play by the Lalit Kala Kendra, officially called the Centre for Performing Arts, was based on the backstage banter of actors who perform various roles in 'Ramleela'.

Based on a complaint lodged by the ABVP functionary Harshwardhan Harpude, a case was registered under section 295 (A) (deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class) and other relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code(IPC).

The FIR also stated, when members of the ABVP took objection to the play and stopped the performance, the artistes started heckling and assaulted them. *—PTI*

PUBLICITY STUNT GONE WRONG

Poonam Pandey faces backlash for faking death

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

"Ridiculous", "disgraceful" and "a new low" is how internet users and several celebrities reacted to actor-model Poonam Pandey's reappearance on social media a day after her team claimed that she died from cervical cancer.

Pandey's team had on Friday dropped the bombshell news of her death from the disease, but it was a hoax, a stunt pulled off by the actor, who appeared in a video on Saturday and declared that she is "alive".

The intention behind the stunt, according to Pandey, was to spread awareness about cervical cancer.

However, the stunt didn't land well with the social media users, including celebrities like Pooja Bhatt, Sara Khan, Aly Goni and Rahul Vaidya, who furiously

The intention behind the stunt, according to Pandey, was to spread awareness about cervical cancer **PHOTO: PTI**

- Pandey's team had on Friday dropped the bombshell news of her death from the disease, but it was a hoax, a stunt pulled off by the actor, who appeared in a video on Saturday and declared that she is "alive".

slammed Pandey for faking her death and demeaning an important cause.

"I never delete tweets but did so in the case where I expressed my shock at news of Poonam Pandey's demise due to cervical cancer. Why? Turns out the news was engineered by a digital/PR team. Absolute disgrace & disservice to those battling the same-her included," she posted on X.

Singer and former "Bigg Boss" contestant Vaidya said he never believed in the news that Pandey died from cervical cancer.

"And I was right!! Now that poonam is alive I can surely say RIP PR/ marketing. New low of creating a sensational/viral campaign .. welcome to KALYUG," he posted.

"How stupid and how lame it is to fake your death. It's sad, and alarming, I think it will be right to put the person and there entire pr team behind the bars to set an example for the future, for no nonsense, fake news mumbaipolice # poonam Pandey and an alarm to media houses to always check the reality of a situation first hand and then post on the ur news forums, authenticity check plz," Actor Kushal Tandon wrote in an Instagram story.

"Worst publicity stunt ever," said one user.

One post read, "What a shameful girl she is. How can you stoop so low for a cheap publicity stunts. We will never trust you again as they say trust is the most expensive thing in the world, cheap people can't afford it as Poonam Pandey.#PoonamPandey #PoonamPandeyDeath."

In the sea of criticism, there were few voices who came out in her support.

"#PoonamPandey is alive. She wanted to spread awareness about Cervical Cancer. Because of her effort yesterday millions talked about cervical cancer. Hats off to her," one user said. *—PTI*

Kota hostel seized for no 'anti-suicide' fans

KOTA 3 FEB

District administration seized the Kota hostel facility as it lacked anti-suicide devices in ceiling fans on Saturday.

The action on the hostel was initiated days after a 19-year-old student from Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad allegedly committed suicide.

An inquiry was initiated by additional district magistrate court after a student allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself in the hostel room last month and on basis of the inquiry report, the ADM court directed to initiate action under CrPC Section 133 and to seize hostel Kanchan Residency in Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, Talwandi Kota, Goswami said.

Speaking on this, ADM Brij Mohan Bairwa said the proprietor of the hostel, Hisub Soni, and caretaker of the hostel, Raghunandan Sharma, were strictly ordered to comply with the conditions mentioned in the court order. Kanchan Residency has 32 rooms, 10 of them occupied by students while the rest are vacant and the proprietor was directed to shift the 10 students to some other hostel by 5 February.

Kota district authorities had ordered hostels to install a spring device on ceiling fans that foils suicide attempts.

So far three student suicides have been reported in the coaching hub this year.

Last year, there were 26 suspected suicide cases of coaching students in Kota, the highest for the city, where over two lakh students arrive from across the country every year for preparation for medical and engineering entrance exams. *—PTI*

CROSSING THE BORDER

US Border Patrol agents speak with migrants seeking asylum, mainly from Colombia, China and Ecuador, in a makeshift, mountainous campsite after crossing the border between Mexico and the United States, on Friday near Jacumba, Calif
PHOTO: PTI

Imran's PTI scrambles to stay afloat in polls

PAKISTAN'S ELECTION

With the former primer minister Imran behind bars, for PTI one important link to the voters is cut off, and the very display of his image on television is also banned
PHOTO: PTI

First, the fundamentals: In Pakistan, the election cycle is not the only process to be watched when determining the future political direction of the country; the cycle of the appointments of, and extensions granted to, the army Chief is of equal and sometimes greater importance.

That is because Pakistan's chequered political history is the tale of a push and pull between civilian politicians and the military establishment; ground is gained and ceded and relations span the spectrum of cooperation, co-optation and confrontation – sometimes within the same tenure – and all depending on who is the current face of the civilian regime and who is heading the establishment. Nothing is a monolith, after all. Right now, that vengeance is on full, naked, display with just about every trick in the book, traditional and brand-new, being used to decimate the former governing party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

This week, former prime minister Imran Khan was sentenced to 10 years and 14 years in jail in two consecutive cases and has been barred from holding public office for a decade. Many other PTI leaders have also been imprisoned along with a host of party workers, most of whom were arrested in the aftermath of the events of 9 May, 2023, when military installations were attacked during protests against the army that turned violent. PTI flags, posters and banners are largely missing from the streets of Pakistan, and credible reports indicate that this is at least in part because printers have been instructed not to cater to such orders.

With Khan unable to conduct his signature daily speeches, one important link to the voters is cut off, and the very display of his image on television is also banned. But the PTI adapted by doing what they do best: leveraging social media and technology. In this case, from notes provided by Khan himself, they created an artificial intelligence-generated voice to address a virtual rally, a first not only in Pakistan but perhaps anywhere in the world.

Then begins the digital cat-and-mouse game, with Pakistan's internet experiencing a mysterious slowdown just about every time the PTI decides to hold an online rally. The authorities explain this away as a "technical" fault due to an unexplained "upgradation" of software. Yet, the real arterial wound to the PTI was the controversial decision to take away the party's election symbol: the cricket bat. This works on many levels.

PTI candidates will now have to contest as independents, which means that the party will not be able to avail the 70 National Assembly seats reserved for women and minorities that are proportionally distributed among all parties that manage to get more than 5 percent of the vote.

Then there is the confusion: PTI nominees are contesting the elections with a host of symbols and if even 10 percent of PTI voters are uncertain who their actual candidate is, well then, that is another cut right there. To counter this, PTI launched an app in which one can enter the constituency name and find out who the party is fielding, and to counter a possible chewing on the internet cable by the aforementioned shark, an offline version was also created, along with a website.

But to counter that countermove, a fake website was created with almost the same name as the actual website but which provided incorrect information. Also, those elected will be elected as independents and will be susceptible to pressure or inducements to join other parties after being elected, and because they are independents, will be able to do so without incurring any legal penalties.

PTI allied with the military to destabilise the government of former (and possibly future) Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and, when in power, spared no effort in trying to erase their political opponents from the map. It is an open secret that it was the establishment that kept the PTI's governing coalition together, and when a clash of interests and egos started,then that same establishment stood aside and let the whole edifice crumble.Now the military appears to have bet on a different horse. Sharif's party, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), tactically and temporarily joined hands with the Pakistan People's Party controlled by the Bhutto family, just to get rid of Khan — even though they themselves have never been on good terms and have also faced the wrath of the establishment time and again.

In that lies the central tragedy of Pakistani politics: that politicians only acknowledge the wrongs done to them, and not the wrongs done to their opponents; that they only remember fair play and democratic norms when out of power. That today's victims are tomorrow's oppressors or, at the very least, partners in that oppression. Perhaps one day that will change, but for now, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

Courtesy, Al-Jazeera

SALAR ساڈا

AI Model learns words through child's eyes and ears

In new research, an AI model was trained to learn words and concepts through the eyes and ears of a single child, using headcam video recordings from when the child was six months old and through their second birthday.

Researchers showed that the artificial intelligence (AI) model could learn a substantial number of words and concepts using limited slices of what the child experienced. Even though the video captured only one percent of the child's waking hours, they said that was enough for genuine language learning.

"By using AI models to study the real language-learning problem faced by children, we can address classic debates about what ingredients children need to learn words - whether they need language-specific biases, innate knowledge, or just associative learning to get going," said Brenden Lake, an assistant professor in NYU's Center for Data Science and Department of Psychology and senior author of the study published in the journal Science.

For developing the model, the researchers first analysed a child's learning process captured on first-person video - via a light, head-mounted camera - on a weekly basis beginning at six months and through 25 months.

Using the video footage collected of over 60 hours, the team observed that it contained roughly a quarter of a million-word instances - the number of words communicated, many of them repeatedly - that were linked with video frames of what the child saw as those words were spoken.

For developing the model, the researchers first analysed a child's learning process captured on first-person video ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

The footage also included a wide range of different activities across development, including mealtimes, reading books, and the child playing, the team said.

The researchers then trained a multimodal neural network with two separate modules - one that took in single frames of the video and another that took in the transcribed form of the speech directed at the child.

These modules were combined and trained using an algorithm called contrastive learning, which aims to learn by making associations in the input data, they said.

For instance, they explained, that when a parent said something in the child's view, it was likely that some of the words used were likely referring to something that the child could see, which meant that comprehension was instilled by linking visual and linguistic cues.

"This provides the model a clue as to which words should be associated with which objects," said Wai Keen Vong, a research scientist at NYU's Center for Data Science.

"Combining these cues is what enables contrastive learning to gradually determine which words belong with which visuals and to capture the learning of a child's first words," said Vong.

After training the model, the team tested it by presenting the model with the target word and an array of four different image options and asking it to select the image that matched the target word.

The model was able to learn a "substantial" number of the words and concepts present in the child's everyday experience, the researchers said.

Further, for some of the words the model learned, it was observed to be able to generalise them to visual instances different from those it saw in its training data.

This, the researchers said, reflected an aspect of generalisation also seen in children when they are studied in lab.

—PTI

Researchers showed that the Artificial Intelligence model could learn a substantial number of words and concepts using limited slices of what the child experienced
PHOTO: LINKEDIN

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Injured and alone- Children in Gaza orphaned by war

More than 11,500 under-18s have been killed according to Palestinian health officials
PHOTO: PTI

Born amid the horrors of the war in Gaza, the month-old baby girl lying in an incubator has never known a parent's embrace.

She was delivered by Caesarean section after her mother, Hanna, was crushed in an Israeli air strike. Hanna did not live to name her daughter.

"We just call her the daughter of Hanna Abu Amsha," says nurse Warda al-Awawda, who is caring for the tiny newborn at the al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza.

In the chaos caused by the ongoing fighting and with entire families almost wiped out, medics and rescuers often struggle to find carers for bereaved children.

"We have lost contact with her family," the nurse tells us. "None of her relatives have shown up and we don't know what happened to her father."

Children, who make up nearly half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, have had their lives shattered by the brutal war.

Although Israel says it strives to avoid civilian casualties, including issuing evacuation orders, more than 11,500 under-18s have been killed according to Palestinian health officials. Even more have injuries, many of them life-changing.

It is hard to get accurate figures but according to a recent report from Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, a non-profit group, more than 24,000 children have also lost one or both parents.

Ibrahim Abu Mouss, just 10 years old, suffered severe leg and stomach injuries when a missile hit his home. But his tears are for his dead mum, grandfather and sister.

"They kept telling me they were being treated upstairs in the hospital," says Ibrahim as his father clutches his hand.

"But I found out the truth when I saw photos on my dad's phone. I cried so much that I hurt all over."

The cousins of the Hussein family used to play together but now they sit solemnly by the sandy graves where some of their relatives are buried by a school-turned-shelter in central Gaza. Each has lost one or both parents.

"The missile fell on my mum's lap and her body was torn into pieces. For days we were taking her body parts from the rubble of the house," says Abed Hussein, who lived in al-Bureij refugee camp.

"When they said that my brother, my uncle and my whole family were killed I felt like my heart was bleeding with fire."

With dark bags around his eyes, Abed stays awake at night frightened by the sounds of Israeli shelling and feeling alone.

"When my mum and dad were alive, I used to sleep but after they were killed, I can't sleep any more. I used to sleep next to my dad," he explains.

Abed and his two surviving siblings are being looked after by his grandmother but everyday life is very hard.

"There's no food or water," he says. "I have a stomach ache from drinking sea water."

"Everything is sad," says Kinza, whose father was killed by a missile

Kinza Hussein's father was killed trying to fetch flour to make bread. She is haunted by the image of his corpse, brought home for burial after he was killed by a missile.

"He had no eyes, and his tongue was cut," she remembers.

"All we want is for the war to be over," she says. "Everything is sad."

Nearly everyone in Gaza now relies on aid handouts for the basics of life. According to UN figures, some 1.7 million people have been displaced, with many forced to move repeatedly in search of safety.

But the UN's children's agency, UNICEF says its biggest concern is for an estimated 19,000 children who are orphaned or have ended up alone with no adult to look after them.

"Many of these children have been found under the rubble or have lost their parents in the bombing of their home," Jonathan Crickx, Chief of communications for Unicef Palestine, tells me from Rafah in southern Gaza. Others have been found at Israeli checkpoints, hospitals and on the streets.

"The youngest ones very often cannot say their name and even the older ones are usually in shock so it can be extremely difficult to identify them and potentially regroup them with their extended family."

Abed Hussein, whose parents were both killed, says he can't sleep at night without them

Even when relatives can be found, they are not always well placed to help care for bereaved children.

"Let's keep in mind they are often also in a very dire situation," Crickx says.

"They may have their own children to take care of and it can be difficult, if not impossible, for them to take care of these unaccompanied and separated children."

Since the war started, a non-profit organisation, SOS Children's Villages, which works locally with Unicef, says it has been working to take in 55 such children, all aged under 10. It has employed additional specialist staff in Rafah to give psychological help.

A senior SOS staff member tells me about a four-year-old who had been left at a checkpoint. She was brought in with selective mutism, an anxiety disorder which left her unable to speak about what had happened to her and her family, but is now making progress after being welcomed with gifts and playing with other children she lives with.

UNICEF believes that nearly all children in Gaza are now in need of mental health support.

With their lives shattered, even when there is a lasting ceasefire, many will be left with terrible losses that they will struggle to overcome.

—BBC News

Un-Islamic marriage case: Imran, wife get 7 years jail

ISLAMABAD, 3 FEB

A Pakistan court on Saturday sentenced jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to seven years imprisonment in the un-Islamic nikah' case, less than a week before the general elections.

This is 71-year-old Khan's fourth conviction since 2022 adding to the troubles of the beleaguered founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party ahead of the 8 February polls. Bibi's first husband, Khawar Maneka, had filed the case, alleging that she violated the Islamic practice of observing the mandatory pause or Iddat between two marriages.

Maneka also accused his ex-wife and Khan of being in an adulterous relationship before marriage, a crime punishable by death by stoning.

General election of Pakistan **PHOTO: X**

"The verdict was pronounced by Senior Civil Judge Qudratullah today, a day after the hearing of the case was conducted inside the Adiala Jail premises at Rawalpindi for 14 hours on Friday," Geo News said and added that Qudratullah also slapped fines of Rs 5,00,000 each on the couple.

Both Khan and Bushra were present in the courtroom when the verdict was announced. Earlier this week, Khan, 71, was sentenced to 10 years in the cipher case and 14 years in the Toshakhana case. Arrested on 5 August last year, when he was found guilty in the Toshakhana corruption case filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), Khan has since been imprisoned - first in the Attock Jail and later shifted to the Adiala Jail.

- Both Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were present in the courtroom when the verdict was announced

Following his conviction in what has come to be known as the Iddat case, Khan told court reporters that the case against him was created to "humiliate and disgrace" both him and his spouse, Bushra Bibi.

On Friday, the cross-examination of the four prosecution witnesses was completed, while Khan and Bibi, 49, submitted a joint statement, answering 13 questions. *—PTI*

Paris knife attack: 3 wounded at Gare de Lyon station

PARIS, 3 FEB

Three people have been wounded in a knife attack at a major train station in Paris, police say. One person suffered serious stomach wounds during the stabbings at the Gare de Lyon on Saturday morning. A suspect is in custody. Police say he is a Malian national who presented an Italian driving licence to officers. There have been several knife attacks in Paris in the recent past. In December oa tourist was killed and two others wounded near the Eiffel Tower. "The suspect did not cry out during his attack," a police source said. "He presented the police an Italian driving licence". In January last year, six people were injured after a stabbing at the capital's Gare du Nord. *—BBC News*

Singapore Muslims can consume lab-cultivated meat

SINGAPORE, 3 FEB

Muslims in Singapore will be allowed to consume lab-cultivated meat if the cells are from animals that are also halal, and the final ingredients do not contain any non-halal components. Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir, the Mufti of Singapore, said that this decision is an example of how fatwa research has to evolve with modern technology and social change, according to a report by TODAY newspaper on Saturday. He was giving a speech on Friday to launch a two-day international conference on Fatwa in Contemporary Societies. In Islam, fatwas are religious rulings to guide the Muslim community on the various aspects of religious life and are formal interpretations of Islamic law by a qualified religious scholar known as a mufti. Masagos Zulkifli, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, also told reporters on the sidelines of the conference that the issue of lab-cultivated meat had been studied by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) since 2022. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/MUSICARES

Bon Jovi honoured as MusicCares Person of the Year

LOS ANGELES, 3 FEB

New Jersey came to the West Coast to kick off Grammy Awards weekend, with native sons Jon Bon Jovi and Bruce Springsteen teaming up. The occasion was to honor Bon Jovi for his musical achievements and philanthropic efforts as MusiCares Person of the Year on Friday night. Bon Jovi hailed Springsteen as "my hero, my friend, my mentor" to a crowd of 2,000 at the Los Angeles Convention Centre. Instead of performing at the end of the evening as is traditional for the honoree, Bon Jovi got the nearly three-hour show going. He and Springsteen traded guitar licks on "Who Says You Can't Go Home" as scenes of New Jersey were projected behind them," with Bon Jovi on harmonica before Springsteen joined him. *—AP*

London judge acquits climate activist Thunberg

LONDON, 3 FEB

Climate activist Greta Thunberg was acquitted on Friday of a charge of refusing to follow a police order to leave a protest blocking the entrance to a major oil and gas industry conference in London last year. The courtroom gallery erupted with applause as Judge John Law told Thunberg and her four co-defendants to stand and told them they were cleared of the criminal charge of breaching the Public Order Act. The judge cited "significant deficiencies in the evidence" presented by the prosecutor. Law said the police could have applied less restrictive measures and didn't properly define where protesters should move, while their order to disperse was "so unclear that it was unlawful". *—AP*

US strikes will bring disastrous result: Iraq

US conducted airstrikes on 85 targets in Iraq, Syria

WASHINGTON, 3 FEB

The US has conducted major airstrikes on 85 targets in Iraq and Syria against Iranian Revolutionary Guards and affiliated militia groups in retaliation for a drone strike on an American base in Jordan last Sunday that killed three of its service members. The airstrikes employed more than 125 precision munitions.

A spokesperson for Iraq's Prime Minister says the US strikes are a "violation" of Iraq's sovereignty, according to AFP news agency. General Yehia Rasool adds that the strikes will bring "disastrous consequences for the security and stability of Iraq and the region", AFP reports. In a statement, Yahya Rasool, a spokesperson for Iraq's Armed Forces, decried the strikes as a "violation of Iraqi sovereignty."

"The city of Al-Qaim and the Iraqi border areas are being subjected to airstrikes by US aircraft, at a time when Iraq is striving hard to ensure the stability of the region," Rasool said. Iran-backed militants have targeted US military facilities in Iraq and Syria over 160 times since October, and several Republican lawmakers had called for the US to hit inside Iran directly to send a clear message.

US President Joe Biden watches the return of the remains of three US soldiers killed in a drone attack in Jordan **PHOTO: AP**

Damascus has responded to the US strikes against Iranian forces and allied militias in Iraq and Syria, saying the American "occupation" of Syrian territory "cannot continue". In a statement, shared by Sana news agency, the Syrian military says that a number of people were killed and others wounded, without providing specific figures.

President Joe Biden and other top US leaders had been warning for days that America would strike back at the militias, and they made it clear it wouldn't be just one hit but a "tiered response" over time. Biden said the US military response "will continue at times and places of our choosing."

"The United States does not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world. But let all those who might seek to do us harm know this: If you harm an American, we will respond," Biden said in a statement after the US started carrying out such strikes on Friday.

Biden said this past Sunday that three American soldiers were killed in Jordan by a drone launched by militant groups backed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Three US soldiers were killed and more than 40 personnel injured in a drone attack at a US base in Jordan called Tower 22.

The facilities that were struck included command and control operations centres, intelligence centres, rockets, and missiles, unmanned aerial vehicle storages, and logistics and munition supply chain facilities of militia groups and their IRGC sponsors who facilitated attacks against US and Coalition forces, the CENTCOM said. *—AP/ BBC News*

PAKISTAN IS ALL READY FOR 8 FEB POLL

ISLAMABAD, 3 FEB

Pakistani authorities have said that they have completed all arrangements for holding general elections on 8 February, including the printing of over 260 million ballot papers for all constituencies of the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies.

According to the Election Commission Pakistan (ECP), there are over 120 million registered voters for the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies and 90,675 polling stations have been established across the country, including 41,403 combined polling stations while 25,320 are for male and 23,952 for women voters.

A total of about 18,000 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly (NA) and the four provincial assemblies. The four provincial assemblies in which elections will take place are Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan province. NA has a total of 336 seats; 266 general seats, 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims and 60 reserved seats for women. ECP's Director of General Political Finance, Masood Akhtar Sherwani, said on Friday that the printing of the ballot paper had been completed, reported The Express Tribune. "The printing of ballot papers commenced on January 14 and concluded today," he said. *—PTI*

Workers hang banners of election candidates from political parties on a highway ahead of general elections in Pakistan **PHOTO: PTI**

Minority Hindus feel left out of poll process

KARACHI, 3 FEB

Ahead of the February 8 general elections in Pakistan, members of the minority Hindu community feel they are mostly left out of the poll process despite having a notable presence, especially in the southern Sindh province.

The census showed that Hindus account for just 2.14 per cent of the total population in Muslim-majority Pakistan and in Sindh itself their large concentration means they account for nearly nine per cent. Under Pakistan's Constitution, 10 seats are reserved for members of minority communities in the National Assembly and 24 seats in the provinces.

Leaders and members of the Hindu community rue the fact that they are not given proper representation and many are not even registered as voters. Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, the Patron-in-Chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council, noted that the Hindu community, especially those belonging to the lower economic sector or those living in remote villages in Sindh feel left out of the election process. *—PTI*

Trump spent $76M on attorneys

Trump's Save America political action committee paid Bartov nearly $9,30,000 last year **PHOTO: AP**

WASHINGTON, 3 FEB

Donald Trump's storied business career is checkered by bankruptcies and blunders. His investment in Eli Bartov, a New York University accounting professor, looms as another failed venture.

Trump's Save America political action committee paid Bartov nearly $9,30,000 last year as an expert witness in the New York attorney general's civil fraud case that threatens the former president's real estate empire, according to new Federal Election Commission filings. New York Supreme Court Judge Arthur Engoron declared in December the professor's testimony proved only that "for a million or so dollars, some experts will say whatever you want them to say." An AP analysis of new Federal Election Commission filings shows the payments to Bartov are among $54 million in legal expenditures made last year by Trump's political fundraising machine. The spending came as Trump has been battling multiple lawsuits.

Coupled with FEC data from 2022, AP's review found that Save America, Trump's presidential campaign and his other fundraising organizations have devoted $76.7 million to legal fees over the two years. *—AP*

'PEOPLE DYING FROM STARVATION IN SUDAN'

CAIRO, 3 FEB

The UN food agency said on Friday it has received reports of people dying from starvation in Sudan, where raging fighting between rival generals is hampering the distribution of aid and food supplies to those most hungry. The 10 months of clashes between the Sudanese military, led by Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces, a powerful paramilitary group commanded by Gen Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, has decimated vast swaths of the northeastern Africa country. *—AP*

N Korea says it tested cruise missiles with 'super-large' warheads

SEOUL, 3 FEB

North Korea said it tested cruise missiles outfitted with new "super-large" warheads as well as a new type of anti-aircraft missile, extending a streak in weapons demonstrations that has rival South Korea worried.

The report Saturday by North Korean state media came a day after South Korea's military said it detected the North launching multiple cruise missiles into waters off its western coast. It's the country's fourth round of launches of such weapons in 2024.

North Korean photos of the test showed a low-flying cruise missile striking a target built on a coastal shore, and another projectile soaring into the air after being launched from ground.

In announcing the development of larger warheads for cruise missiles, North Korea could be trying to emphasize that these missiles are intended to be armed with nuclear weapons.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency did not specify the number of missiles tested or the details of their performance. The agency said the tests were part of the country's "normal activities" for military development and did not affect the security of neighbours.

Cruise missiles are among a growing collection of North Korean weapons designed to overwhelm regional missile defences. They supplement the country's vast lineup of ballistic missiles, including long-range weapons aimed at the continental United States. *—AP*

'KIEL IS COLORFUL'

Participants hold a banner with the slogan "Kiel is colorful" at a demonstration against right-wing extremism in Kiel, Germany on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

UK's Labour Party trying to reconnect with British Indians

LONDON, 3 FEB

The UK's Opposition Labour Party is overhauling its outreach efforts to British Indians, amid concern that the party's support among the country's largest ethnic minority has slumped in recent years, according to a media report.

Indian-origin people remain both the largest Asian ethnic group and largest non-white ethnic group in the UK and constitute 3.1 per cent of the population at 1.8 million, according to the 2021 UK census. The Labour Party led by Keir Starmer has taken a series of measures designed to reconnect with British Indians, including hiring two community outreach volunteers, revamping the Labour Friends of India group and organising a trip to India for two of its senior shadow ministers, The Guardian newspaper reported on Thursday.

There is growing evidence that Labour has lost the support of people of Indian descent. In 2010, 61 per cent of British Indians said they supported Labour, but a survey seen by the Guardian shows by 2019 that figure had dropped to just 30 per cent.

Senior Labour leaders worry that having Rishi Sunak as Britain's first Hindu prime minister could increase the trend. Focus groups carried out late last year among first-, second- and third-generation Indians by the consultancy Public First showed the problem facing Labour.

One participant said Sunak's position showed the "tables were turning" for British Indians, while another commented: "It's really good how he's brought the Indian community into the traditions of 10 Downing Street." The latest a general election must be called is January 2025, but there is a very small chance that Sunak would want to delay the polls beyond next year.

According to the 2021 Census, Hindus in England and Wales enumerated 1,032,775, or 1.7 per cent of the population. "We've taken Indian voters for granted for years, but it's becoming increasingly obvious they are going elsewhere and we need to do something about that," the paper quoted one party official as saying. *—PTI*

DAY 710 OF WAR

World Court says it will hear part of Russia-Ukraine genocide case

THE HAGUE, 3 FEB

The United Nations' top court said on Friday it has jurisdiction to rule on a request by Ukraine for a declaration that Kyiv is not responsible for genocide, but not on other aspects of a Ukrainian case against Russia.

The two countries have at various times accused each other of committing genocide. Ukraine filed its case at the International Court of Justice just days after Russia's February 2022 invasion, alleging that Moscow used trumped-up claims of genocide to justify its attack that unleashed Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

But the court said it could not rule on that issue. Instead, it will rule on whether Ukraine violated the convention — as Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed to justify the invasion.

A final, legally binding decision is likely still years away. "In the present case, even if the Russian Federation had, in bad faith, alleged that Ukraine committed genocide and taken certain measures against it under such a pretext, which the respondent (Ukraine) contends, this would not in itself constitute a violation of obligations" under the genocide convention, the court's President Joan E Donoghue said.

Netanyahu **PHOTO: X**

The court said it did not have jurisdiction to rule on whether Russia's invasion violated the 1948 genocide convention and whether Moscow's recognition of two breakaway republics in eastern Ukraine also amounted to a breach of the convention.

Despite those setbacks, Ukraine hailed the ruling as a victory that will allow the case to continue.

"It is important that the court will decide on the issue that Ukraine is not responsible for some mythical genocide, which the Russian Federation falsely alleged that Ukraine has committed," the leader of Ukraine's legal team, Anton Korynevych, told reporters. *—AP*

ONDC introduces ticketing service for Chennai Metro Rail

CHENNAI, 3 FEB

Following the launch of the service in Chennai, ONDC in a statement here said, the Kochi Metro, Kanpur Metro, Pune Metro, and other metro rail services are poised to join the network.Passengers travelling on the Chennai Metro Rail can purchase 'single' or 'return' journey tickets through the applications -- 'Rapido', 'NammaYatri', 'redBus' which are currently available on the ONDC network.The overall ticketing experience on the ONDC network was enabled by CMRL partnering with 'Yaary', the first seller-side technology partner, the release said."At ONDC, we believe in embracing innovation. As Chennai Metro joins the Open Network, it is not just a milestone but rather a bold stride towards revolutionising mass transit. *—PTI*

Govt slashes windfall tax on crude petroleum

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Government has hiked windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil to Rs 3,200 per tonne from Rs 1,700 per tonne with effect from Saturday.The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED).According to an official notification, SAED on export of diesel, petrol, and jet fuel or ATF, has been retained at nil.The new rates are effective from 3 February.India first imposed windfall profit taxes on 1 July, 2022, joining a host of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies.The tax rates are reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks. *—PTI*

Quess Corp Q3 consolidated net profit falls 27%

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

Business services provider Quess Corp has reported a 27.23 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 63.88 crore during the quarter ending December 2023. The company's net profit stood at Rs 87.79 crore during the corresponding quarter of last fiscal, Quess Corp said in a regulatory filing on Friday.Last year's third quarter PAT (profit after tax) included a one-time exceptional gain of Rs 53.5 crore due to the company's divestment in digital risk and compliance services company Simpliance. Revenue from operations of the company witnessed a growth of 8 per cent during the quarter under review at Rs 4,841.83 crore compared to Rs 4,465.55 crore in the same period of last year. *—PTI*

Deloitte CEO among 4 named to US-India forum

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Prashant Ruia, director of Essar group, and Deloitte global CEO Joe Ucuzoglu are among four industry bigwigs who have been appointed to the board of US-India Strategic Partnership Forum.Ruia, it said, has been an integral part of Essar's operations and management since 1985, playing a key role in driving the growth, diversification, and value creation, both within India and internationally.Under his leadership, Essar is transitioning its existing assets towards a greener economy, investing in sector-transforming sustainable businesses, it said. USISPF Chairman John Chambers congratulated the new appointees, stating, "After all the groundbreaking accomplishments 2023 brought for the US-India partnership, I'm excited for the new year with the addition of these well-accomplished leaders to the USISPF Board."Alex, Prashant, Raj, and Joe will add even more breadth to USISPF's roster of private sector experts, underscoring the passion from Fortune 250 companies to increase relations and business between US and India."Ruia said the appointment resonates with the mutual commitment to advancing stronger economic ties between the United States and India." *—PTI*

Money laundering concerns, led to ban on Paytm Bank by RBI

RBI has asked Paytm Payments Bank Ltd to halt business after 29 Feb

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Money laundering concerns and questionable dealings of hundreds of crores of rupees between popular wallet Paytm and its lesser-known banking arm had led Reserve Bank of India to clamp down on tech poster boy Vijay Sekhar Sharma-run entities, sources said.

The central bank has ordered Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to halt most of its business including taking further deposits, conducting credit transactions and carrying out top-ups on any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, and cards for paying road tolls after 29 February.

The PPBL, sources said, had lakhs of non-KYC (Know Your Customer) compliant accounts and in thousands of cases single PANs were used for opening multiple accounts.

There were instances where the total value of transactions - running into crores of rupees, much beyond regulatory limits in minimum KYC pre-paid instruments raising money laundering concerns, sources said.

Sources said the RBI in 2021 detected serious KYC Anti Money Laundering violations and the bank was directed to address these deficiencies *PHOTO: X*

Sources said the RBI in 2021 detected serious KYC Anti Money Laundering violations and the bank was directed to address these deficiencies. However, they continued to persist.

The compliances submitted by the bank were found to be incomplete and false on many occasions, sources said.

Accordingly, in March 2022, RBI imposed supervisory restriction on PPBL to stop on-boarding new customers with immediate effect and to appoint an external audit firm to conduct a comprehensive system audit.

There are several cases where the accounts and wallets have been frozen by various law enforcement agencies across the country as such accounts were used for committing digital frauds.

As part of a clean-up exercise, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in September 2022 had conducted raids at the premises of PPBL and its parent entity One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) and other payment aggregators.

The ED had initiated a probe under the criminal sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after a number of instances of gullible debtors ending their lives came to the fore from various states.

It was alleged that the illegal digital loan companies sourced all personal data of the loan-taker at the time of downloading these apps on their phones.

According to a senior government official, ED would further probe money laundering allegations going forward if required.

In two days, the company's market capitalisation (mcap) eroded by Rs 17,378.41 crore to Rs 30,931.59 crore. *—PTI*

The minister asked PLI incentive beneficiary firms to share their constructive criticism and feedback *PHOTO: PTI*

PLI scheme to kickstart competition: Goyal

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The industry should look at the measures under the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme as an initial support because going forward, the industry has to face competition to grow further, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday.

He asked the PLI incentive beneficiary firms to share their "constructive criticism and feedback for better implementation of the scheme".

The idea is to make India a manufacturing powerhouse and there is a long journey ahead, he said.

More than 1,200 stakeholders, including government officials and industry players are meeting here and deliberating on the progress of 14 PLI schemes.

The scheme incentives should not be seen as crutches and "we are not looking to make you dependent on government subsidies. This is only like a kickstart...

A more outward looking effort would help add scale, volume and enhance cost effectiveness, he said, adding, "We are also looking for your cooperation and collaboration".

Speaking at the meeting, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh called upon the industry to focus on value addition as India's manufacturing Gross Value Added (GVA) is about 17.4 per cent.

It is not enough for a country that is looking to become a developed nation and for huge job creation, Singh said.

He added that certain quarters have raised some problems with regards to the scheme and the government is working to address those issues.

The most important thing is that this government trusts the private sector and it has made this scheme in consultation with the industry.

Officials from 10 ministries and departments, project management agencies and industry players from 14 PLI schemes are attending the meeting.

The discussions are likely to set higher standards of achievements of the PLI scheme and facilitate its effective implementation going forward. *—PTI*

Tesla ordered to pay $1.5 M over hazardous waste breaches

CALIFORNIA, 3 FEB

California judge on Friday ordered Tesla Inc. to pay USD 1.5 million as part of a settlement of a civil case alleging the company mishandled hazardous waste at its car service centers, energy centers and a factory, multiple county district attorneys announced.

The complaint filed in San Joaquin County alleged illegal disposal of hazardous waste and violation of laws involving storage and management of the waste, according to statements from several of 25 district attorneys offices in California involved in the case. The district attorneys' statements said Tesla cooperated with the investigation and acted to improve compliance with laws that were brought to its attention by the prosecutors.

District attorneys' statements said Tesla cooperated with the investigation and acted to improve compliance with laws *PHOTO: X*

"Electric vehicles play a role in environmental betterment, yet it's imperative to recognize that their production and maintenance yield detrimental waste," said San Joaquin County District Attorney Ron Freitas. Tesla owns and operates approximately 57 car service centers and 18 solar energy facilities in California, and manufactures electric vehicles in the San Francisco Bay Area city of Fremont. *—PTI*

Park Hotels garner ₹409cr ahead of IPO

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Ltd, which runs hotels under the "The Park" brand, has mobilised Rs 409.5 crore from anchor investors days before its initial public offering. The company has decided to allocate 2.64 crore equity shares to 37 funds at Rs 155 apiece, which is also the upper end of the price band, according to a circular uploaded on BSE's website on Friday.

Societe Generale, Citigroup Global Markets Mauritius, Integrated Core Strategies (Asia) Pte Ltd, Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company, SBI General Insurance Company, Kotak Mahindra Life Insurance Company, and CLSA Global Markets Pte Ltd are among the anchor investors. In addition, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund (MF), Edelweiss Mutual Fund, Whiteoak Capital, Bandhan Mutual Fund and Quant Mutual Fund participated in the anchor round.

The issue with a price band of Rs 147 to Rs 155 per share will open for public subscription on 5 February and conclude on 7 February. The Rs 920-crore IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 600 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of equity shares to the tune of Rs 320 crore by promoters and investor shareholders.

The company has decided to allocate 2.64 crore equity shares to 37 funds at Rs 155 apiece, which is also the upper end of the price band *PHOTO: PTI*

- The issue with a price band of Rs 147 to Rs 155 per share will open for public subscription on 5 February and conclude on 7 February

Those offering shares in the OFS are Apeejay Surrendra Trust, Apeejay Pvt Ltd, RECP IV Park Hotel Investors Ltd, and RECP IV Park Co-Investors Ltd. At present, promoters and promoter group members hold a 94.18 per cent stake in the company, and the two investors own 5.82 per cent shareholding in the firm. *—PTI*

SBI NET PROFIT DECLINES 35% TO ₹9,164CR IN Q3

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The country's largest lender SBI on Saturday reported a 35 per cent fall in standalone net profit to Rs 9,164 crore for the December quarter.State Bank of India (SBI) had earned a net profit of Rs 14,205 crore in the year-ago period.The bank's total income rose to Rs 1,18,193 crore in the third quarter of the ongoing fiscal as against Rs 98,084 crore in the same period a year ago, the bank said in a regulatory filing.During the quarter, the bank earned interest income of Rs 1,06,734 crore as against Rs 86,616 crore in the same period a year ago. SBI's Non-Performing Assets (NPA) of the total advances declined to 2.42 per cent at December-end from 3.14 per cent at the end of the third quarter of last year. Similarly, net Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) also eased to 0.64 per cent against 0.77 per cent at the end of the same period a year ago. *—PTI*

TO FOSTER INNOVATION

A MoU was signed between Google India and DIBD which outlines partnership to advance AI technology *PHOTO: PTI*

Govt bodies sign pact with Google, Meta, IBM

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Government bodies have signed memoranda of understanding with Google, Facebook-owner Meta and IBM to foster innovation and investment in the country, Parliament was informed on Friday.

Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar in a written reply to Rajya Sabha said that the government recognizes the potential of emerging technologies and is actively working with the private sector to foster innovation and promote their utilization.

"To foster innovation and investment, Ministry has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with various global Indian technology and research names. These agreements aim to enhance India's standing and talent in the emerging technology domain," he said.

He mentioned that MoUs (memorandum of understandings) were signed between IBM India and three entities engaged with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in October 2023 to advance and accelerate innovation in AI, semiconductor, and quantum technology for India.A MoU was signed between Google India and Digital India Bhashini Division (DIBD) which outlines a strategic partnership to advance artificial intelligence (AI) technology and promote language inclusivity in India in September 2023.

In July 2023, India AI and Meta signed an MoU to establish a framework in AI and emerging Technologies and in September 2022, MeitYStartup Hub (MSH) and Meta collaborated to accelerate XR technology startups in India, he said.

"Our Ministry understands that in May 2018, Google and NITI Aayog signed a Statement of Intent to enhance India's artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) eco system,'' Chandrasekhar said.He said Google informed NITI Aayog regarding working document towards Responsible AIforALL, that it has developed machine learning applications to tackle significant societal challenges in India, including flood forecasting and diabetic retinopathy."In this regard, Google's flood forecasting initiative was first piloted in the Patna region of Bihar in 2018 and then was extended to the whole of India by 2020, covering 200 million people across more than 250,000 square kilometers. Subsequently, Google improved their notification infrastructure and expanded the products to inform affected individuals, by adding better crisis information on Google Maps," Chandrasekhar said. *—PTI*

10 YEARS OF NADELLA IN MICROSOFT

Satya Nadella caps a decade of change and tremendous growth

WASHINGTON, 3 FEB

Satya Nadella marks his tenth year as Microsoft CEO on Sunday, capping a decade of stunning growth as he pivoted the slow-moving software giant into a laser focus on cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

Microsoft's stock has soared by more than 1,000% since Indian-origin Nadella took the helm in 2014, compared to the more gradual 185% growth of the broader S&P 500. Microsoft now has a market value of 3 trillion more than any U.S. publicly traded company, including its longtime rival Apple.

"Nadella's had the biggest transformation of a tech company potentially ever," said Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives. "The only one that would rival it was (Steve) Jobs coming back to Apple and turning it around with the iPhone."

Microsoft has created 2.8 trillion in shareholder wealth in the past decade, meaning an investor who bought a 10,000 stake in Microsoft at the time Nadella took over and did nothing with those shares, would have a stake worth about 113,000 now.

"Our industry does not respect tradition it only respects innovation,"

Microsoft's stock has soared by more than 1,000% since Indian-origin Nadella took the helm in 2014 *PHOTO: X*

Nadella told employees in an inaugural memo 10 years ago, an opening salvo that hinted at bigger shifts to come. Microsoft declined requests for an interview.

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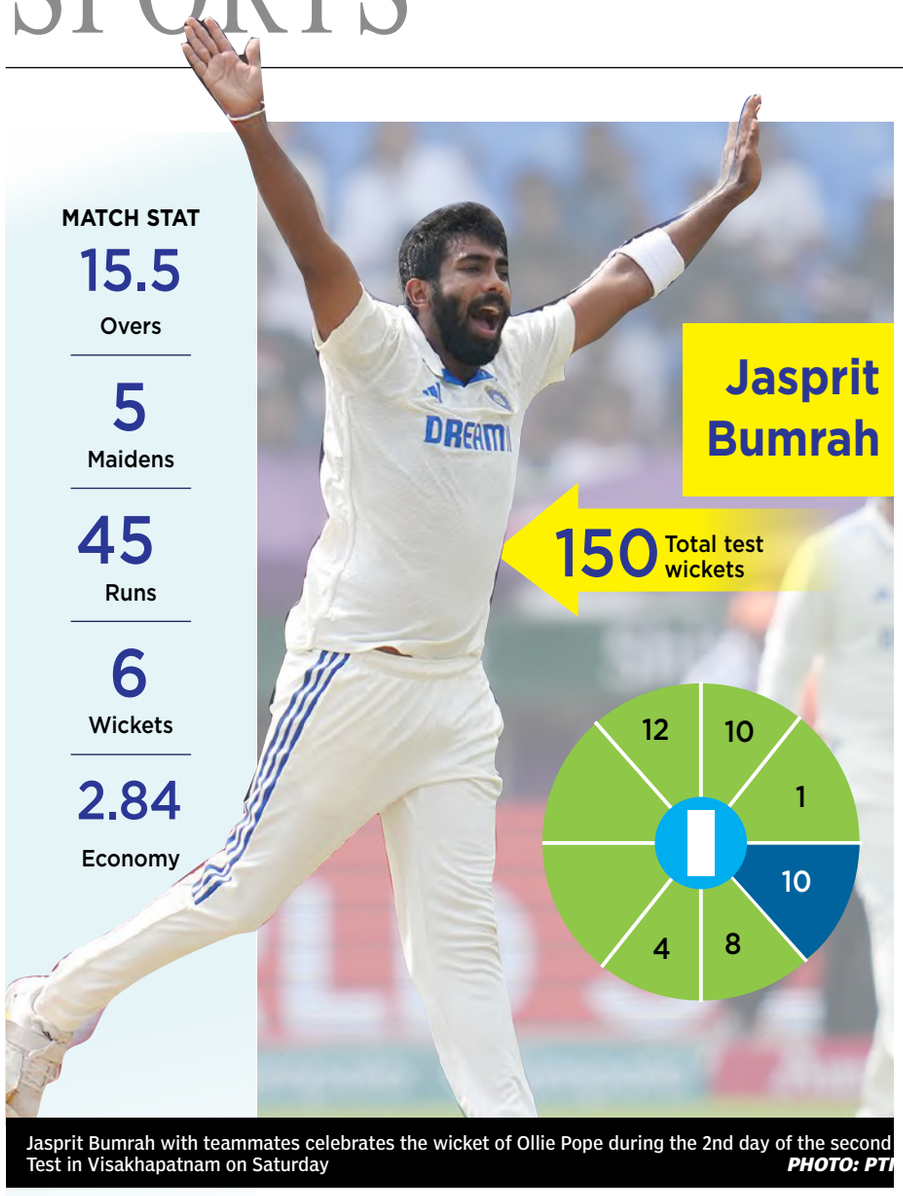
Big changes came quickly under Nadella. He marshaled resources to build up the Azure cloud computing platform, a shift in priorities from the company's longtime reliance on its flagship Windows operating system and the royalties it gets for each PC sold with it. And he largely put the brakes on Microsoft's ill-fated attempts to play catch-up in the smartphone market, marked by his predecessor Ballmer'sBut some of the biggest changes were in the company's culture, a shift away from Microsoft's brash external reputation and internal bickering to a more collaborative approach that Nadella has modeled in his own collegial personality and engineer's mindset.

Much of Nadella's strength is how he stands out from the typical "very strong ego CEO," said RaimoLenschow, a stock analyst at Barclays who covers 36 tech companies. Instead of making bold pronouncements, Lenschow said Nadella takes a more measured approach to explaining "where he thinks the future is going."

Nadella has long made the accessibility of technology a priority, informed in part by his experience raising a son who was visually impaired, quadriplegic and had cerebral palsy. Zain Nadella died in 2022. *—PTI*



Jasprit Bumrah with teammates celebrates the wicket of Ollie Pope during the 2nd day of the second Test in Visakhapatnam on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Bumrah brilliance puts Eng on back foot

Jaiswal played a marathon knock of 209 out of 290 balls

VISAKHAPATNAM, 3 FEB

Jasprit Bumrah put up a special exhibition of reverse swing on a flat deck after Yashasvi Jaiswal's maiden double hundred to bowl out England for 253 in their first innings and put India ahead in the second Test here on Saturday.

India tallied 396 all out in their first innings after starting day two at 336 for six. Jaiswal (209 off 290) became the third youngest double centurion from India in the morning session and was the sole shining light in an otherwise grim batting effort.

In response, England were bowled out in 55.5 overs in the final session to concede a 143-run first innings lead to India. Needing to bat five overs before stumps on day two, India were unscathed at 28 for no loss in their second innings.

England began aggressively courtesy Zak Crawley (76 off 78) before Bumrah halted their charge with a masterclass in reverse swing that resulted in his 10th five-wicket haul. He ended with figures of six for 45 in 15.5 overs, his best in India. He also became the second fastest Asian fast bowler after Pakistan's Waqar Younis to complete 150 scalps.

Joe Root (5), Ollie Pope (23), Jonny Bairstow (25) and England skipper Ben Stokes (47) were victims of Bumrah's brilliance. The 30-year-old also completed 150 wickets in the process. Kuldeep Yadav, playing his first game of the series, supported Bumrah with three wickets. R Ashwin could not get a wicket while second pacer Mukesh Kumar was taken to the cleaners.

England were bowled out in 55.5 overs in the final session to concede a 143-run first innings lead to India **PHOTO: X/BCCI**

India have managed to gain advantage but will need to bat well on day three as no total can be considered safe against the 'Bazball' driven England side. The pitch is gradually deteriorating with the odd ball keeping low or bouncing extra. On either side of the afternoon and evening session, watching Bumrah go about his business was a sight to behold. *—PTI*

LET JAISWAL PLAY DON'T OVER-HYPE, SAYS GAMBHIR

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Former India cricketer Gautam Gambhir is not in favour of over-hyping Yashasvi Jaiswal's double hundred in the second Test against England as he feels the natural game of youngsters like him is adversely affected by the increased burden of expectations.

India opener Jaiswal scored his maiden Test double hundred in the ongoing second Test in Visakhapatnam on Saturday, becoming the third-youngest Indian to achieve the feat. Playing only his sixth Test, the 22-year-old's sensational knock of 209 off 290 balls single-handedly powered India to 396 all out in 112 overs on the second day of the match. Jaiswal's accomplishment marked him as the first Indian left-hander since Gambhir to score a double hundred in the traditional format. Gambhir achieved the feat in 2008 against Australia.

"I want to congratulate the youngster for his achievement but, more importantly, I want to tell everyone that let the young man play," Gambhir said. *—PTI*

India Physical Disability team clinch T20 series over Eng

AHMEDABAD, 3 FEB

The Indian Physical Disability Cricket Team showcased their prowess, sealing a 3-1 series win against England in a captivating encounter at Ahmedabad on Saturday. Ravindra Sante earned the Man of the Match award for his exceptional all-round performance. Sante contributed significantly with bat, ball, and in the field, securing India's triumph. With the series now at 3-1, India looks to maintain their dominance in the fifth and final match scheduled for February 6 at the world's biggest cricket arena the Narendra Modi Stadium. Sante's consistent contributions have played a pivotal role in India's success throughout the series. Facing an early setback with two quick wickets for just 21 runs in the initial four overs, India recovered through a crucial third-wicket partnership between skipper Vikrant Keni and Lokesh Marghade, contributing 50 runs. *—ANI*

Varsha bags 300m short-track race gold in KIWG

LEH, 3 FEB

Top Indian ice-skater Varsha Puranik proved her credentials yet again, clinching gold in the 300m short-track race for women (above 17 years category) at the Khelo India Winter Games here on Saturday. Varsha's Karnataka teammate Akash Aradhya also hogged the limelight with his second individual gold at the games. Varsha and Akash, who won the men's over-17 short track (500m) event on this day, have given their state a head-start in the short-form skating competition. Karnataka have three gold medals out of the five decided so far and are leading the overall tally. Telangana won their first gold when Tallur Naiyanashri won the women's Under-17 short track final. *—PTI*

Mercedes chief holds no grudge on Hamilton's move

LONDON, 3 FEB

American Executive, Toto Wolff said that Lewis Hamilton's move to Ferrari did not surprise Mercedes, and he has "no grudge" against the seven-time world champion for leaving to join a rival. On Thursday, Ferrari stunned the sporting world by announcing that the seven-time world champion will join the Italian team for the 2025 Formula One season on a multi-year contract. The news brings an end to Hamilton's what is currently a 17-year-long relationship in F1 with Mercedes-Benz and an 11-year-long partnership with the works team. Addressing the media in a virtual briefing on Friday, Mercedes team chief Wolff stated that the structure of the arrangement with Hamilton, which contained a break option after the 2024 season, had given him little doubt that what would be a 12-year association was coming to an end. *—ANI*

WOMEN'S HOCKEY LEAGUE

India face China in their opener

BHUBANESHWAR, 3 FEB

- In their maiden appearance in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2021/22, the team finished third behind Argentina and the Netherlands

The Indian Women's Hockey Team, led by Savita and vice-captained by Vandana Katariya, has turned their focus to the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24. India qualified for the League after clinching the gold medal at the FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup Spain 2022.

In their maiden appearance in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2021/22, the team finished third behind Argentina and the Netherlands.

Chief Coach Janneke Schopman expressed her excitement to be back in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24, saying, "It's great to be back in Odisha, everyone here is supportive of hockey and we want to do our best here. Now we want to show we are a good team and we can play against good teams as well. We won't get the Olympics back but we can only look forward, and that is our plan, we want to show that we can play hockey."

The FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24 (Women) is scheduled to take place at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar from 3 February to 9 February, before moving to the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, where the league will continue from 12 February to 18 February. Five national teams - India, China, the United States of America, the Netherlands, and Australia - will participate in the India leg of the FIH Pro League 2023/24, facing each other once in Bhubaneswar and once in Rourkela.

India will take on reigning Asian Games Champions China in their first game on 3 February, followed by a clash with the Netherlands on 4 February. They will face off against Australia on 7 February before playing their last game in Bhubaneswar against the United States on 9 February. *—ANI*

We have a lot more left in tank: Satwik

CHENNAI, 3 FEB

India's ace doubles shuttler Satwiksairaj Rankireddy is confident he and his partner Chirag Shetty have enough in the tank to fire during the Paris Olympics later this year.

Satwik, who regained the world No.1 doubles ranking following back-to-back runners-up finishes in the Malaysia Open and the India Open, indicated that the pair will have a different strategy during the quadrennial showpiece event.

"We don't want to peak right now (chuckles); we're keeping our best game for the Olympics. We have a lot more left in our tank, and we are coming up with different gameplay and plans before the Olympics," Satwik told PTI during a promotional event here on Saturday.

The duo will play some events before the Olympics, including the All England where they have been seeded No 1. However, Satwik is not getting carried away by the top-seed tag at the All England, and said that whoever plays better will take the honours.

"We have a lot of tournaments coming up before the Olympics, including the All England, which is very special for all our team members, where we want to do well. But, in the back of the mind, we are thinking about the Olympics. "I just got to know about it (top seeding) yesterday. It feels special. But all these numbers are just there for happiness, and don't matter on the given day, as we can lose to anyone. So, we are not thinking much about our seeding. *—PTI*

Indian badminton player Satwiksairaj Rankireddy at a promotional event, in Chennai, Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

DAVIS CUP

Ramkumar, Balaji deliver in high-pressure contest

ISLAMABAD, 3 FEB

India blunted Pakistan's challenge on the opening day to take a 2-0 lead in the Davis Cup World Group I play-off tie with Ramkumar Ramanathan and N Sriram Balaji rising to the occasion in the high-pressure contest, here Saturday.

A fired-up Aisam-ul-haq Qureshi gave his all in a tight opening singles but the intensity of the match and tough conditions took a toll on him as he suffered a hamstring injury in the third set, which prevented a close finish to a hard-fought contest. Ramkumar served extremely well in the match and also returned better in the second set to prevail 6-7 (3) 7-6 (4), 6-0 while 43-year-old Aisam served 10 double faults in the match, going for broke.

Ramkumar's strong serving and percentage tennis was key to the outcome of the match.

He served nine games at love, keeping the points short and crisp.

Down by a set, Ramkumar wriggled out of a tough situation when serving at 3-4, he was down 15-40 and never looked back in the match in which he fired 20 aces.

Balaji, a doubles specialist, was challenged by Aqeel Khan, but the Indian defeated the veteran Pakistani 7-5, 6-3 in the rain-hit second singles. Balaji had a grip over the match. He broke Aqeel once in both the sets. His movement, strong serve, use of drop shots all came together for a comfortable win in the end.

India are one win away from advancing to the World Group I. Yuki Bhambri and Saketh Myneni will now look to seal the tie on Sunday when they take on Muzammil Murtaza and Barkat Ullah in the third match. *—PTI*

India's Ramkumar Ramanathan during the match between India and Pakistan, in Islamabad on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Chouhan misses cut in tough conditions

BAHRAIN, 3 FEB

India's Om Prakash Chouhan was unable to come to terms with the high, swirling winds and difficult scoring conditions to miss the cut at the Bahrain Championship.

The 2023 Order of Merit winner in India's PGTI circuit, shot rounds of 1-under 71 and then went to 10-over 82 in the second. Chouhan, who missed the cut in Ras Al Khaimah last week, just couldn't find his way around the tough conditions. He dropped two double bogeys and seven bogeys against just one birdie.

Meanwhile, Jesper Svensson carded a red-hot seven-under par round of 65 to surge into a share of the lead alongside Dylan Frittelli and Joel Girrbach.

The Swede was six-under through his first eight holes before going on to sign for a 65 to reach nine under par at the halfway stage. Frittelli, twice a winner on the DP World Tour who also won the 2019 John Deere Classic on the PGA TOUR, birdied his last hole with the light fading late in the day to put the finishing touches to a four-under 68, making it a three-way tie at the top after Switzerland's Girrbach set the target earlier in the day.

Prakash Chouhan **PHOTO: X**

The weather on the second day in the Kingdom of Bahrain was in stark contrast to the first, with the calm conditions being replaced by high, swirling winds and subsequently scoring became much harder. The leading trio share a one-stroke lead from Spain's Alejandro del Rey, who is fourth on eight under par, while Guerrier is joined by countryman and round one leader Tom Vaillant, Welshman Jamie Donaldson, Australia's Harrison Endycott and South African Ockie Strydom in a share of fifth on seven under. *—PTI*

DERBY FEVER

The Kolkata Derby has ended in a 2-2 draw. Mohun Bagan equalised as Dimitros Petratos scored after East Bengal captain Cleiton Silva gave his team a 2-1 lead in the second half **PHOTO: PTI**

Punjab FC convincing 3-1 win against BFC

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Punjab FC scored three past Bengaluru FC to secure a comfortable Round 13 victory in the Indian Super League to move to ninth position in the table. Wilmar Jordan Gil, Luka Majcen and Madih Talal scored the goals for the home side while Sunil Chhetri scored the consolation goal for Bengaluru FC. Bengaluru FC dropped to 10th with 11 points. This is the home side's second victory of the season. Punjab FC started brightly in the opening exchanges, making the Bengaluru defence work hard. Luka Majcen and Wilmar Jordan combined well along with Madih Talal to create chances but they could not capitalise on those, with Ashis Pradhan missing the best of them.

Punjab FC got punished against the run of play as Sunil Chhetri's glancing header from a Roshan Singh cross found the net, giving the away side the lead. Punjab FC struck back within eight minutes after a patient spell of play.

Tekcham Abhishek Singh's inviting ball in the box was headed into the goal, giving goalkeeper Gurpreet Sandhu no chance to react. Punjab could have increased the lead as they created a couple of chances but were denied by Gurpreet as both teams went into the break with the scores tied at one each. *—PTI*

Everton fights back late to draw with Tottenham

LIVERPOOL, 3 FEB

Defender Jarrad Branthwaite headed home a stoppage-time equalizer as Everton salvaged a 2-2 draw with Tottenham in the Premier League on Saturday after Richarlison had scored twice against his former team.

Richarlison looked to have boosted Tottenham's push for a top-four finish by taking his tally to nine goals in his last eight league games. But Branthwaite was on hand at the far post to nod home a deflected free kick in the fourth minute of added time for his first goal of the season.

It ruined a perfect return to Goodison Park for Richarlison, who spent five seasons at Everton before joining Tottenham in 2022. The Brazil striker didn't celebrate either of his goals — instead pulling his shirt up to hide his face. After a tough start to the season, Richarlison has found his scoring form recently and put the visitors ahead twice in the first half. He first turned in a cross from Destiny Udogie after just four minutes, and then bent a first-time strike into the far corner from outside the area in the 41st after he was teed up by James Maddison. *—AP*

Iran beats Japan 2-1 to advance to Asian Cup SF

AL RAYYAN, 3 FEB

Alireza Jahanbakhsh's last-minute penalty gave Iran a 2-1 win over Japan on Saturday and a place in the Asian Cup semifinals for just the second time since 2004.

Jahanbakhsh kept his cool in the 96th minute to keep Iran on course for a first title since 1976 and fourth overall. Ko Itakura had been whistled for the foul and Jahanbakhsh gave goalkeeper Zion Suzuki no chance.

Iran came from behind after Hidemasa Morita put pre-tournament favorite Japan ahead in the first half of an entertaining quarterfinal match at Education City Stadium. Mohammad Mohebi leveled the score in the 55th minute. Iran will face either host Qatar or Uzbekistan in the semifinals. Iran started aggressively with Jahanbakhsh firing just over from the left after 13 minutes. Shortly after Saeid Ezatolahi shot straight at goalkeeper Zion Suzuki.

PHOTO: AP

Japan, looking for a record fifth win, took the lead in the 28th minute. Morita collected a pass, skipped past Hossein Kanani to enter the area and while his shot was soft, it seemed to confuse Alireza Beiranvand and the ball bounced off the goalkeeper's leg and into the net. Iran, without suspended star striker Mehdi Taremi, almost leveled six minutes before the break when Brentford midfielder Saman Ghoddos shot just wide. *—AP*